

Syrian Christians under Islam

The First Thousand Years

Edited by David Thomas



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SYRIAN CHRISTIANS UNDER ISLAM

The First Thousand Years

EDITED BY

DAVID THOMAS



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INTRODUCTION

The history of encounters between Christians and Muslims in the lands of Greater Syria, the *bilād al-Shām* of the times before national boundaries, is older than that in almost any other part of the Islamic world. In fact, if there is any historical recollection preserved in the ancient account of the meeting between the boy Muḥammad and the Christian hermit Baḥīrā, it may even paradoxically be regarded as predating the appearance of Islam itself.

When it is remembered that Muḥammad went on trading journeys into Greater Syria as a young merchant, and in later life recounted his experience of being taken by night to Jerusalem and from there ascending to heaven, and that he led the first Muslim prayers in the direction of that city until he was given a new *qibla*, it will be seen that Syria was closely bound up with the life of the Prophet and his early community. The expeditions after his death set out north for Syria, and the Battle of Yarmūk in 15/636 was the first decisive meeting between Muslim Arab and Christian Byzantine armies. When Muʿāwīya established his capital at Damascus in 41/661, Greater Syria came under a Muslim government and, with the exception of the Crusader kingdoms in the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries, it remained so until the twentieth century. Its Christian populations learned to accept and survive under Muslim rule, and were frequently free to make their own contribution to the life of wider society. They loyally defended their beliefs and religious practices, but in part gradually came under the linguistic and cultural influence of their rulers. From the long and intimate experience of encounters distinctive forms of Christianity developed.

Christian and Muslim interaction in Greater Syria was an appropriate theme for the third in the series of Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposiums on Arab Christianity and Islam. This series of Symposiums is intended to honour Dr Alphonse Mingana (1878–1937), the Iraqi priest who contributed substantially to scholarship on Christianity in the Middle East in the early part of the last century, and brought to Woodbrooke College the collection of Syriac and Arabic Christian manuscripts that bear his name (they are now preserved in the Orchard Learning Resources Centre at Selly Oak).¹ With a general focus upon Arab Christianity and Islam in the pre-Ottoman period, the Symposiums

¹ Mingana's life has been summed up by S. K. Samir, *Alphonse Mingana 1878–1937*, Birmingham 1990 (Occasional Paper No. 7).

have previously dealt with “Christian Arabic Apologetics during the ‘Abbasid Period (750–1258)” (1990), and “Coptic Arabic Christianity before the Ottomans: Text and Context” (1994). The papers from both these Symposiums have been published.²

Between 7 and 11 September 1998, a group of students, researchers and scholars met in the intimate surroundings of Woodbrooke College, Selly Oak, Birmingham, where Mingana had temporarily lived, for the third Symposium on the theme of “Arab Christianity in *Bilād al-Shām* in the pre-Ottoman Period”. They listened to and discussed the papers collected in this volume. These papers touch on aspects of the encounters between Christians and Muslims in Greater Syria from the beginnings of Islam to the eighth/fourteenth century, and they show the great complexity of interactions between the faiths, the considerable intellectual interdependence that developed between them, and the continuing polemical edge that persisted in the written records they produced. While they do not in any sense tell the history of Christian-Muslim relations in Greater Syria, they attest to the richness and surprisingly lively story of Christians through the centuries of the Umayyad, ‘Abbasid and succeeding dynasties.

The papers are arranged in the rough chronological order of their subjects. Sidney Griffith’s chapter defends the thesis that the Christian community known as the Melkites came into being in response to pressures exerted mainly within the early Islamic world. Here Christians felt compelled to state what they believed as clearly as they were able, and in this process those who remained loyal to the Chalcedonian tradition distinguished themselves from their main rivals the ‘Jacobites’ and ‘Nestorians’. He examines polemical works of the two major proponents of the early Islamic ‘Melkite’ community, John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra, and the latter’s ‘Jacobite’ rival Ḥabīb Ibn Khidma Abū Rā’īta, and demonstrates that their controversial arguments arose from their intention to define themselves from other Christians within the wider context of the alien faith. As such they are not so much continuities of the conciliar period as products of the new era in which oriental Christianity achieved its own identity.

Barbara Roggema’s study of quotations from the Qur’an included in a late Christian version of the Baḥīrā story shows eloquently how Christians in the early ‘Abbasid era ingeniously attempted to neutralise the text of Muslim scripture by attributing many of its teachings to the

² See *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid period (750–1258)*, edited by S. K. Samir and J. S. Nielsen, Leiden, 1994; and *Medieval Encounters* 2, 1996, edited by D. Thomas.

Christian who recognised and, in their eyes, taught Muḥammad. Her examination demonstrates both the thorough acquaintance that Christians had with the Qur'an and their awareness of discussions among Muslims about interpretation problems. They put this knowledge to use in order to defend their own position in terms of the Qur'an itself.

In his contribution Samir Khalil surveys references to the Prophet Muḥammad in seven Christian authors from the second/eighth to the seventh/thirteenth century. He finds a considerable amount of knowledge about the Prophet's life and activities, but more importantly serious attempts to explain his religious significance outside Islam. While no one actually calls him a prophet in so many words, and there is more or less consensus that he himself was the author of the Qur'an, there are enough carefully formulated words of praise to show that he was thought by some, at least, to have a measure of divine approval.

These qualified acknowledgements of Muḥammad are put into perspective by Mark Swanson's re-examination of the account of the martyrdom of Qays al-Ghassānī, who became the monk 'Abd al-Masīḥ, from the third/ninth century. After setting it in its historical and literary context, he argues that the purpose of this account was to give moral encouragement to its Christian readers, by showing first the difference between Christianity and Islam, then that the way of return was open to those who had gone over to the rival faith, and thirdly that martyrdom should not be sought for self glorification, but accepted in God's good time. The story is both a mild criticism of more unrestrained retellings of martyrdoms and a stark witness to the routine hostility between Christians and Muslims at this time.

Lawrence Conrad's account of the career of the Christian physician Ibn Buṭlān casts Christian-Muslim relations at this time in yet another light. This fifth/eleventh century Nestorian travelled widely in the Middle East through both the Islamic and Byzantine empires, and made friends as well as professional enemies among Christians and Muslims alike. His extant writings reveal him as a man who had no religious or denominational axe to grind, but rather one who felt at ease in society and looked on its religious diversity with liberal open-mindedness. It is not certain that his experiences and outlook were typical of Christians in his time, and he may have accentuated his Arab identity and thus found as much in common with Muslims as with fellow-Christian intellectuals. Nevertheless, his recollected experiences show the wide possibilities open to anyone with professional ability, and make plain that religious loyalties were sometimes quite unimportant.

By contrast with this individual case study, Seta Dadoyan's chapter is a wide-ranging discussion of the activities of Armenian Christians in Syria between the fourth/tenth and sixth/twelfth centuries. Her careful

searching through previously known texts and assembling together of fragmentary references leads her to detect a whole substratum of activity by bands of Armenian mercenaries and clan groups. These often operated on the edge of established society, but from time to time, through the weakness of central government or their own political manoeuvring, they were able to play a part in the major events of their region, and sometimes influence their course. Despite being largely ignored by the chroniclers of Greater Syria, the part played in Syrian history by these unpredictable insurgents, who veered between their ancestral faith and Islam, is not to be underestimated.

Lucy-Anne Hunt's chapter is a study of some illustrated folios attributable to a Syriac lectionary of the seventh/thirteenth century, and probably originating from a monastery in Tūr 'Abdīn. Their style and subject matter are closely similar to other contemporary lectionaries which have survived intact, and also bear affinities with illustrations in Muslim works from the area of the same time. They are a small but eloquent witness of the cultural influences which Christian artists came under, and also of the continuing liveliness of religious art among Syrian churches in the turbulent period of the Crusades.

The last contribution, by David Thomas, is a study of arguments in a letter by the Melkite Bishop Paul of Antioch which attempt to demonstrate how the Qur'an both confirms cardinal Christian beliefs, and is no more than a secondary witness to them. This letter set off incensed reactions among Muslims in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries. Some years after it was written an unknown Cypriot editor attempted to tone down its acerbities. His alterations, which are also examined here, show how he sought to make the letter less unpalatable to Muslim recipients. Both the original and the later edited version attest to supreme confidence among Syrian Christians at this time, as well as thorough knowledge of the Qur'an, not to speak of bitter almost provocative hostility between followers of the two rival faiths.

This varied collection sets out to do no more than show facets of Syrian Christian life under medieval Islam. If the different chapters point to any one conclusion, it is that Christianity reacted quickly to the Muslim presence, and came gradually to respond and accommodate to its increasing cultural and intellectual influence, though it never lost confidence in its own patrimony and preserved this with firmness and verve.

The task of editing the papers was assisted greatly by the authors' readiness to make minor revisions in their papers, and promptness in answering queries. The practicalities were almost entirely managed by Carol Bebawi, whose unflagging efficiency and care alleviated many of the pains that editing can inflict. With this work she has completed the

task of overseeing the running of the Symposium in 1998, and increased the participants' debt to her.

The Third Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium was honoured by the presence of Mor Gregorios Yuhanna Ibrahim, Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo. As well as participating in the discussions, he also opened the proceedings, when he spoke about the continuing life of Christians in Syria. The speech he made at the ceremony is included as a Foreword to this collection.

FOREWORD

Opening speech of the Symposium by Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Archbishop of Aleppo.

It gives me great pleasure to declare open the Third Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on "Arab Christianity in *Bilād al-Shām* in the Pre-Ottoman Period".

I come from a multi-religious society of Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Jews today number only a few hundred, the Christians a little over one million, and the Muslims more than fifteen million. These statistics show the rapid decline of Christians in my country: in the forties and fifties of the twentieth century they made up over twenty percent of the population. Who can say what will happen in the future?

Christians in Syria in the seventh century were among the first to receive and embrace the Arab Muslims coming from the Arabian peninsula. Before that time there was a strong Christian presence in Syria, though it was divided into two different denominations, the Syrian non-Chalcedonians, wrongly called 'Jacobites' and 'Monophysites', known today as the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, and the Syrian Chalcedonians, called 'Melkites', today known as the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch. Both were very active in their witness and devotion, though their history has now changed considerably. Today the two great apostolic churches of the past have become seven churches, each with a different doctrinal background, structure and jurisdiction. At the same time they all claim to belong to the one apostolic root.

I am not here to draw a pessimistic picture of the Christian presence in today's Syria. Many negative factors which lay behind the schisms that divided the churches do not exist today, and ecumenism now plays a great role in the lives of all Christians, not only those who belong to the Antiochian heritage but also the Armenian, Latin, Protestant and Evangelical churches. They all share a common witness in society and they insist that one Christian voice should represent their past, present and future coexistence. In this way they are making history in the dialogue of life and works, and their inter-church dialogue is a positive factor in working with other living faiths.

This is the real picture of the Christian presence in Syria. The three patriarchates of Antiochene origin in Damascus, namely the Syrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic, and other churches are all represented on the Middle East Council of Churches, which includes the four Christian families of Oriental Orthodox, Eastern

Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical. This new expression of Christianity in the Middle East has provided welcome opportunities in this ecumenical arena not only to meet, share and discuss, but also to nurture the Christian witness in a brotherly spirit and atmosphere. Christians in the Middle East today can have a sense of togetherness, live together in mutual respect and be ready to co-exist and live with peoples of other living faiths in the area.

Everyone will be aware of the suffering in the region since the beginning of the last century, the two World Wars, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the civil war in Lebanon, the Iraq-Iran war, the Gulf War. Against the general backdrop of economic hardship, this suffering has fomented religious sentiments that have boded badly for Christian-Muslim coexistence on the one hand, and the Christian presence on the other. Here are two living examples:

Between 1914 and 1918 my church lost almost 100,000 faithful through fighting, and nearly the same number were uprooted from their homeland. It was a tragedy for a small church that had lived for centuries in that region to be the innocent victim of ignorance, fanaticism and inhuman acts. The continuing memories of suffering from wounds that have not healed will keep historians busy throughout the third millennium. Some of these sad stories have been documented in the publications of the Edessa-Mardin Publishing House.

Since 1948 almost 200,000 people from my church have been dispersed through the two Americas, Europe and Scandinavia. Regardless of their merits and qualifications, they have nearly all started their lives in their new countries as refugees. How can a small community scattered in this way maintain its own character, spirituality, tradition, heritage and language, and also hope to extend its long history? It is a tragedy not only for my church but also for other churches that have lost members of their congregations in the same way.

It is for this very reason that Middle Eastern Christians are actively engaged in the work towards establishing a just and comprehensive peace throughout the region. And here may I say that we applaud the activities of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at Selly Oak for their efforts towards the same end, as they try to increase knowledge and tolerance between Christians and Muslims. We Christians in Syria are there to stay, in order to promote our witness and common understanding, and to be good disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

We thank the Selly Oak Colleges for making this meeting possible, and we pray for the success of the Third Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium. May God bless you all.

'MELKITES', 'JACOBITES' AND THE CHRISTOLOGICAL
CONTROVERSIES IN ARABIC IN
THIRD/NINTH-CENTURY SYRIA

Sidney Griffith

An examination of the heresiographical milieu of Christian denominationalism in the Islamic world as viewed from the works of John of Damascus, Theodore Abū Qurra and Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'iṭa; with special reference to the development of the ecclesiastical profile of the 'Melkites'.

*Christians in the 'Sectarian Milieu'*¹

By the first half of the third/ninth century, the indigenous Christian communities in the Islamic world had already begun to take on the outward trappings of the culture of the then burgeoning 'commonwealth' of Islam.² Many of them had even adopted the Arabic language for ecclesiastical use. None of them were quicker to do so than the 'Melkites', the community of 'Chalcedonian' faith, whose patristic and liturgical heritage had been principally Greek, but also to some extent Aramaic, in both its Palestinian and Syriac expressions.³ Their

¹ In the late 1970s, John Wansbrough wrote an influential book on the development of early Islamic thought under the felicitously phrased title, *The Sectarian Milieu*. In it he studied the growth of early Islamic salvation history, arguing that one should read early Islamic confessional histories in the context of their composition in a milieu which included religious adversaries with their own faith-historical claims, such as Jewish and Christian communities, whose diction and counterclaims influenced the expression of Islamic thought through a process of 'terminological transfer' in the exercise of what Wansbrough thinks of as the 'historicizing' of truth. The same kind of literary and historical analysis *mutatis mutandis* may helpfully be applied to intra-Christian texts produced in the world of Islam, in what one might call a 'heresiographical' milieu; see J. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: content and composition of Islamic salvation history* (London Oriental Series 34), Oxford, 1978.

² See G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: consequences of monotheism in late antiquity*, Princeton, 1993.

³ See S. H. Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic: the languages of the monasteries of Palestine in the Byzantine and early Islamic periods", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51, 1997, pp. 11–31; M. Rubin, "Arabization versus Islamization in the Palestinian Melkite Community during the Early Muslim Period", in A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa eds,

intellectual centre was Jerusalem, and specifically the monastic enclaves of the Judean desert.⁴ In addition to the translation of the scriptures and the patristic, monastic, and hagiographical classics,⁵ the principal theological concerns of the community were twofold: the defence of the Christian faith against the challenge of Islam, and the articulation in Arabic of the distinctive Christological positions that set them apart from the other congregations of Christians in the Islamic world, notably the 'Jacobites' and the 'Nestorians'.⁶

In recent years a considerable amount of scholarly attention has been given to the apologetic and polemical texts in Arabic written by 'Melkites' in response to the challenge of Islam. But scholars have not had so much to say about works devoted to specifically intra-Christian controversies. Yet these compositions are precisely the ones that give expression to the confessional component of the 'Melkite' identity. Arguably, this identity found its classical formulation in the Greek and Arabic Christological and heresiographical texts that were composed in the Holy Land monasteries in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. For while the 'Melkites' professed the conciliar faith of 'Byzantine' orthodoxy, the social profile of their community was not at all 'Byzantine'. Rather, in culture and language they belonged to the world of Islam.⁷ And their religious identity came into full focus in the course of their controversies with Muslims on the one hand, and on the other

Sharing the Sacred: religious contacts and conflicts in the Holy Land, first-fifteenth centuries CE, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 149–62.

⁴ See S. H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Aldershot, 1992; *idem*, "Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam: Constantinople and the Church in the Holy Land in the ninth century", *Medieval Encounters* 3, 1997, pp. 231–65; *idem*, "Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs: saints' lives and Holy Land history", in Kofsky and Stroumsa, *Sharing the Sacred*, pp. 163–207.

⁵ See S. H. Griffith, "The Gospel in Arabic: an inquiry into its appearance in the first Abbasid century", *Oriens Christianus* 69, 1985, pp. 126–67; K. Leeming, "Byzantine Hagiographies in Arabic: three translations from a ninth-century manuscript copied at the Monastery of Mar Saba in Palestine (Vaticanus Arabicus 71)", DPhil. thesis, The University of Oxford, 1997.

⁶ On the impropriety of the term 'Nestorian' to designate a community otherwise called the 'Church of the East', see S. P. Brock, "The 'Nestorian' Church. A Lamentable Misnomer", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 1996, pp. 23–35. Nevertheless, the Arabic sources for the present study, Christian and Muslim, regularly use the term. To avoid confusion it is retained here.

⁷ See S. H. Griffith, "Melkites in the Umayyad Era: the making of a Christian identity in the world of Islam", to appear in the published proceedings of the Fourth Workshop of the Late Antiquity and Early Islam project, "Patterns of Communal Identity in the Late Antique and Early Islamic Near East," London: The Wellcome Trust, 5–7 May 1994.

with their Christian adversaries, in particular the 'Jacobites' and the 'Nestorians'. These controversies had their roots in the pre-Islamic history of the Christians, and for the 'Melkites', their focus had been Jerusalem.⁸

The purpose of the present essay is to explore the development of heresiography and Christology in this context, as a component of the 'Melkite' intellectual profile, and as we find it first in the Greek works of John of Damascus (d. c. 137/754), and then in the Arabic works of Theodore Abū Qurra (c. 138/755–c. 215/830), the 'Melkite' bishop of Ḥarrān, especially in the context of his controversies with the 'Jacobites', and particularly in relation to the doctrine of the Syrian Orthodox teacher, Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'īta (d. c. 236/850). But first we must pay some attention to the denominational label 'Melkite' itself, a term subject to a considerable amount of confusion in modern usage.

The 'Melkites'

One normally thinks of the term 'Melkites' as designating 'those Christians of Syria and Egypt who, refusing Monophysitism and accepting the Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon (451), remained in communion with the Imperial see of Constantinople as "Emperor's men"'.⁹ On this understanding, which is essentially a theological one, 'Melkites' should be in evidence in the historical sources from the mid-fifth century onwards. And such has been the understanding of most modern scholars who have used the term.¹⁰ Effectively, they have meant by it simply the followers of the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon in the oriental patriarchates. But there is evidence in the sources to suggest that this use of the term as a theological label is at once anachronistic, incomplete and, sociologically speaking, inaccurate. What is more, it has had the effect of 'Byzantinizing', so to speak, the history of a Christian community who in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria have had their own quite distinctive experiences. The evidence to which I shall call attention suggests that when the term 'Melkites' first came into currency in the East to designate an identifiable, socio-ecclesial

⁸ See S. H. Griffith, "The Signs and Wonders of Orthodoxy: miracles and monks' lives in sixth century Palestine," in press.

⁹ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edn, Oxford, 1997, p. 1067.

¹⁰ See, e.g., the very title of the most recent multi-volume history of the denomination: J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'église melchite du V^e au XX^e siècle*, 3 vols in 5 parts to date, Louvain, 1979–89.

group, it already marked them not simply as 'Chalcedonian', but as anti-'Jacobite' and anti-'Monothelete' in theology, Hellenophone and Arabophone in language, and as living in the cultural world of the commonwealth of Islam.

The term 'Melkites' itself, as designating a denomination of Christians, seems to have had a slightly more complicated origin than is usually assumed. It is, of course, a term with Semitic roots (*m-l-k*). It is transliterated, almost always in the plural, into Greek (Μελχίται) and thence into other Western languages from an originally Syriac adjective, *malkāyê*, which etymologically means 'kingly', 'royal', or even 'imperial'.¹¹ Similarly, the Arabic substantive adjective of the same meaning, *malakiyya*, follows in the footsteps of its Syriac cognate, from which it is derived in its ecclesiastical sense.¹² In its polemical meaning, as defined by the 'Jacobite' Syriac writer of the sixth/twelfth century, Dionysius bar Šalībī (d. 567/1171), the 'Melkites' are so-called 'because they abandoned the confession of the Fathers and adhered to the opinion of the emperor Marcian (450–7)'.¹³ Thus the term seems at first sight, from a 'Jacobite' point of view, primarily to refer to the supporters of the Christology of the council of Chalcedon, held in Emperor Marcian's reign, but which was promoted particularly in the reigns of the Byzantine emperors Justinian (527–565) and Justin II (565–78) who adopted a policy of imposing Chalcedonian orthodoxy on all the sees of the empire.¹⁴ The theory is that the term *malkāyê* would have been used in Syriac texts in the sense in which the word οἱ βασιλικοί was used in Greek texts, polemically to refer to the 'royalists' who had accepted the Chalcedonian faith of the Byzantine emperors of the sixth and seventh centuries. The problem with this theory as a sufficient explanation of the sense of the name 'Melkite' is that throughout the sixth and seventh centuries one finds in the contemporary Greek and Syriac texts, words like 'synodalist' (συνοδικός, συνοδίτης, *sunhādīqā*) or simply 'Chalcedonian', to refer to an upholder of the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon, but not the term 'Melkite'!

In the first instance, one finds mention of 'Melkites' among Christians only in texts emanating from the Islamic world. So far, the earliest attestation of the term which one can find in a Syriac text is its appear-

¹¹ See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2 vols, London, 1879–1901, vol. II, col. 2144.

¹² See G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, 2nd edn (CSCO 147), Louvain, 1954, p. 108. Graf suggests that the Arabic term was translated directly from the Greek βασιλικοί.

¹³ J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino-Vaticana*, vol. I, Rome, 1719, p. 507.

¹⁴ See P. Allen, "Neo-Chalcedonism and the Patriarchs of the Late Sixth Century", *Byzantion* 50, 1980, pp. 5–17.

ance in the letters of the 'Nestorian' Patriarch Timothy I (164/780–208/823), that is to say in the late second/eighth century at the earliest.¹⁵ The earliest Arabic writer in whose work it has so far been found is the 'Jacobite' Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'īṭa (d. c. 236/850) who wrote a tract specifically in refutation of the 'Melkites' (*radd 'alā al-Malakiyya*),¹⁶ and who regularly identifies his adversaries by this term, which he takes to be virtually synonymous with those 'Chalcedonians' whom he also calls 'Maximianists'.¹⁷

Abū Rā'īṭa's mention of 'Maximianists', along with his several references by name in the same work to Maximus the Confessor (580–622), reminds the reader that as Abū Rā'īṭa used the term 'Melkites' it designated not just upholders of the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon but those in the east who in addition affirmed the teaching of the sixth Council of Byzantine orthodoxy, Constantinople III (680–1), which was called to settle the controversy over Monothelism.¹⁸ In the East this controversy involved an internal split among the Greek and Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians themselves, into 'Monothelite' and 'Dyothelite' factions. That there were a significant number of Syriac-speaking 'Monothelites' in Syria in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries is now abundantly clear from a number of Syriac texts published in recent years by Sebastian Brock.¹⁹ It appears that in so-called 'Monothelite' texts, 'Dyothelites' might be called 'Maximianists',²⁰ while 'Monothelites' are sometimes called 'Maronites' in both 'Jacobite' and 'Melkite' texts.²¹

¹⁵ See A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 88 (trans.), 159 (Syriac). See also the passage from Timothy's letter to Sergius, Metropolitan of Elam, cited in H. Pognon, *Une version syriaque des Aphorismes d'Hippocrate: texte et traduction*, Leipzig, 1903, pp. xxii (Syriac), xxv (trans.).

¹⁶ See G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Jacobiten Ḥabīb Ibn Ḥidmah Abū Rā'īṭah* (CSCO 130, 131), Louvain, 1951, vol. 130, pp. 105–30.

¹⁷ See Graf, "Rechtfertigung des Trishagionzusatzes", *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79.

¹⁸ See F. X. Murphy and P. Sherwood, *Constantinople II et III*, Paris, 1974, pp. 133–260.

¹⁹ See S. P. Brock, "A Syriac Fragment on the Sixth Council", *Oriens Christianus* 57, 1973, pp. 63–71; "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor", *Analecta Bollandiana* 91, 1973, pp. 299–346; "A Monothelite Florilegium in Syriac", in C. Laga et al. eds, *After Chalcedon: Studies in Theology and Church History offered to Professor Albert Van Roey (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta XVIII)*, Leuven, 1985, pp. 35–45; "Two Sets of Monothelite Questions to the Maximianists", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 17, 1986, pp. 119–40. The latter two studies are also available in S. P. Brock, *Studies in Syriac Christianity*, London, 1992.

²⁰ See, e.g., Brock, "Monothelite Questions", p. 124.

²¹ See, e.g., G. Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79; C. Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes de Théodore Abou-Kurra, évêque d'Haran*, Tripoli de Syrie and Rome, 1905,

More will be said about this phenomenon below. For now it is important only to point out that the matters at issue between these groups extended well beyond the purely theoretical issues of the Christological controversies to include also the issue of the proper phrasing of the liturgical formula of the *Trishagion*. 'Melkites' like Theodore Abū Qurra used the shorter form favoured in Constantinople;²² 'Monothelete' Chalcedonians and 'Jacobites' used the longer form often attributed in the sources to Peter the Fuller (d. 488), sometime Patriarch of Antioch in the last third of the fifth century.²³ Again, 'Melkites' like John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra, to name only the two most prominent writers, were ardent defenders of the public veneration of the holy icons, as we shall see below, whereas other Chalcedonians, 'Jacobites' and 'Nestorians', while not being iconoclastic, were more inclined to extol the sign of the cross.²⁴

In regard to the second/eighth century campaign to promote the theology of Maximus the Confessor and the teaching of the Council of Constantinople III, along with the repudiation of the longer form of the *Trishagion* by 'Dyothelite' Chalcedonians, the chronicler Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) records a passage from the work of Dionysius of Tell Maḥrē (d. 845) which provides a 'Jacobite' perspective on the development. The text says:

Although we have already spoken about the heresy of Maximus, how Constantine [IV, 668–85] introduced it into the church of the Romans, after it had been blotted out by his father Constans [II, 641–68],²⁵ we are nevertheless going to give an account of the schism which took place among them in the year 1038 [i.e., 727 AD] because of this heresy and the expression, 'He who was crucified.' For while this opinion [i.e., that of Maximus] was held in the territories of the Romans from the time of Constantine [IV], in no way was it accepted in the territories of Syria. But it was sown by means of the captives and exiles who had come out

pp. 26–9; see also S. K. Samir, "Abū Qurra et les Maronites", *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 41, 1991, pp. 25–33; see also Jean Gribomont, "Documents sur les origines de l'église maronite", *Parole de l'Orient* 5, 1974, pp. 95–132.

²² See V. S. Janeras, "Les Byzantins et le trishagion christologique", in *Miscellanea Liturgica; in onore di sua eminenza il cardinale Giacomo Lercaro*, 2 vols, Rome, 1967, vol. II, pp. 469–99.

²³ See Abū Rā'īṭa's arguments against Abū Qurra on this issue in the former's letter to the Armenian prince Ashūṭ b. Sanbat, in Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, pp. 73–87.

²⁴ See also the discussion and bibliography in K. Parry, "Images in the Church of the East: the evidence from Central Asia and China", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 1996, pp. 143–62.

²⁵ See J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien; patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166–1199)*, 4 vols, Paris, 1899–1910, vol. II, pp. 435–7 (French); vol. IV, pp. 426–7 (Syriac).

with the Arab troops and settled in Syria. In particular, the city-dwellers and nobles were corrupted by this opinion and accepted it because of the kingdom of the Romans taking it up (ὑπόληψις). One of them was Sergius, son of Manṣūr, who oppressed many of the believers who were at Damascus and Hims, and not only did he make them take the expression ὁ σωτηρῶθεις out of the *Trishagion*, but he also was drawing away many of our own to his heresy.²⁶

On the face of it, this passage takes note of the reception in Syria in the first third of the second/eighth century of Byzantine conciliar orthodoxy. The author represents this development as a 'schism' in the Chalcedonian community in Syria, which he dates to the year 727 AD. Moreover, he claims that the seeds for it were sown by 'captives and exiles' who were brought into the area at an unspecified time by 'Arab troops', and that upperclass city-dwellers were particularly susceptible to the new ecclesiastical stance because of the prestige of its adoption among the Romans. The mention of the name of Sergius son of Manṣūr, the father of John of Damascus, who had served the Umayyad caliphs from Mu'awiya I to 'Abd al-Mālik,²⁷ as one who was particularly responsible for the adoption of the new Byzantine ideas in Syria identifies very pointedly not only a particular family, but the social class of those whom the 'Jacobite' writer views as most likely to have been open to Byzantine ideas. That he says they were under the influence of 'captives and exiles' is undoubtedly a polemical element in the account, which conveniently overlooks the fact that Maximus the Confessor was probably a Palestinian by origin and that Sophronius of Jerusalem (c. 590–638) was the most prominent opponent of Monothelitism, along with much of the monastic establishment in Palestine in the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries.²⁸ Finally, the writer's specification of the year 727 as the year in which the 'schism' occurred is difficult to understand, since there is no event in the reign of the caliph Hishām (106/724–126/743) in that year to which one can point as having had such a marked effect in the Christian communities. Nevertheless, by 727 Sergius ibn Manṣūr's son, John of Damascus, was well launched on his career as a monk and as an ecclesiastical writer, and his works did as much as any other factor to define the frame of mind of the 'Byzantine Conformists' in the caliphate, as Andrew Palmer has

²⁶ Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. II, p. 492 (French); vol. IV, pp. 457–8 (Syriac).

²⁷ See J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas; son époque, sa vie, son oeuvre*, Harissa, 1950, pp. 31–7. See also the remarks of M.-F. Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople (viii^e–ix^e siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène", *Travaux et Mémoires* 12, 1994, esp. pp. 193–204.

²⁸ See J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 297–323.

recently described the 'Melkites' of the period.²⁹ Perhaps it is not far-fetched to suggest that the intellectual campaign, of which John of Damascus was so prominent a part, was itself the decisive factor which precipitated that movement among the Syrian Chalcedonians which seemed to the 'Jacobite' chronicler to have reached the proportions of a schism among them by the year 727.

One may therefore take it that the first third of the second/eighth century was the time within which the consolidation of the 'Maximianist' movement within the Chalcedonian Christian community in the Islamic world came insistently to 'Jacobite' notice, by reason of its high public profile. These local Chalcedonian 'Dyothelites' are the 'Melkites', the 'royalists', or the 'Byzantine Conformists' of the Syriac, Greek, and Arabic writers of the following generations. One of the first Muslim writers publicly to take notice of them seems to have been Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), who in one place says of the *Malakiyya* that 'they are like the column and base of Christianity, while the oriental Christians, that is to say the Abadites, called Nestorians and Jacobites, have separated themselves from them and have made a schism.'³⁰

By the end of the first half of the second/eighth century these 'Melkites' of the Islamic world were well on the way to the achievement of a communal identity of their own, an identity which was on the one hand signified by their early adoption of the Arabic language, and on the other hand highlighted in the expression of their religious ideas in Arabic by a distinctive theological discourse which was in many ways conditioned and shaped by the confessional vocabulary of Islam. In this language they defended their differences not only from Judaism and Islam, but from their Christian adversaries as well, principally those whom they regarded as 'Monophysites', 'Monotheletes' or 'Nestorians'. But for the 'Melkites', who were destined eventually to become one of the most Arabicized of the Christian communities in the Islamic world, there always remained the fact that, unlike the 'Jacobites', the Copts, or the 'Nestorians', their patristic and liturgical heritage was almost exclusively Greek. Indeed, it was in the course of the second/eighth century, and particularly in Palestine, that one can observe this identity emerging, beginning in Greek and Aramaic, and flowing into Arabic.³¹ Whereas John of Damascus may be taken to represent the

²⁹ A. Palmer, *The Seventh Century in West-Syrian Chronicles* (Translated Texts for Historians 15), Liverpool, 1993, pp. xxx, 25–7.

³⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, ed. and tr. C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 1861–77, vol. I, p. 200.

³¹ See Griffith, "From Aramaic to Arabic".

last of the influential Greek writers of the era, who nevertheless made distinctive contributions to the new ecclesiastical profile, Theodore Abū Qurra, who wrote in Arabic, may stand for the first of the completely Arabophone 'Melkites'. Both writers were associated with Mar Sabas monastery in the desert of Judah, arguably the intellectual centre of the patriarchate of Jerusalem in the second/eighth century and for years to come.

The Jerusalem patriarchate was in fact the heart of the 'Melkite' church. While there were sister communities in the patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria, after the Persian occupation and the Islamic conquests of the first half of the first/seventh century, the surviving evidence suggests that during the period from the beginning of Islamic rule in the territories of the oriental patriarchates until the irruption of Byzantine rule once again in Antioch in 967, and the coming of the Crusaders from the West at the very end of the fifth/eleventh century, there was a steady decline in the numbers of 'Melkites' and the gradual disappearance of their institutions in many places outside Palestine.³² To be sure, there were Patriarchs of record in both Alexandria and Antioch during this time, as well as incumbents in other sees, but it is emblematic of the state of affairs in this period to note that in the two instances in the sources which mention meetings of the Oriental Patriarchs to issue statements about icon veneration, in 763 and 836 respectively, the venue is said to have been Jerusalem.³³ The Holy City also attracted students, monks and residents from other 'Melkite' communities throughout the period. In this connection one might mention by way of example two notable figures from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries on the Jerusalem scene: Theodore Abū Qurra and Anthony David of Baghdad, both of whose roots were originally in the patriarchate of Antioch.³⁴ Moreover, it is clear that in the sixth

³² See H. Kennedy, "The Melkite Church from the Islamic Conquest to the Crusades: continuity and adaptation in the Byzantine legacy", in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers*, New Rochelle, NY, 1986, pp. 325–43; see also Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, vol. II, tome 2, 750–X^e s.

³³ For the 763 synod in Jerusalem see J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, Florence, 1769–, vol. XII, col. 680. On the 836 synod and its alleged letter to the Byzantine emperor, see the text of the letter in L. Duchesne, "L'iconographie byzantine dans un document grec du IX^e siècle", *Roma e l'Oriente* 5, 1912–3, pp. 222–39, 273–85, 349–66. There are problems about the authenticity of the letter. See now J. A. Munitiz *et al.* eds, *The Letter of the Three Patriarchs to Emperor Theophilus and Related Texts*, Camberley, Surrey, 1997; see also I. Ševčenko, "Constantinople Viewed from the Eastern Provinces in the Middle Byzantine Period", *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3–4, 1979–80, p. 735, n. 36.

³⁴ See S. H. Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah: the intellectual profile of an Arab Christian writer of the first Abbasid century* (Annual lecture of the Irene Halmos Chair of Arabic Literature,

and seventh centuries, in Chalcedonian circles, Palestine and Jerusalem were the epicentre of the Greek literary and theological culture of the orient, the theological matrix from which the Arabic-speaking 'Melkite' community took its sense of socio-confessional identity.³⁵ Jerusalem became the place where the 'Melkite' identity, indued as it was with a certain ecclesiastical Hellenism, was defined. This role of the Holy City, and of the Judean desert monasteries, particularly the monastery of Mar Sabas, is celebrated dramatically in the *Life of Theodore of Edessa*, a work composed in Greek, probably in the fourth/tenth century, but which circulated widely in the 'Melkite' community in an Arabic recension.³⁶

In the Jerusalem milieu in early Islamic times the writer who would contribute the most to the line of thinking what would come to define the 'Melkite' creed was John of Damascus. Scholars have customarily discussed his works as if they were composed in Byzantium, and primarily had reference to the intellectual concerns of Constantinople. This is an error of perspective, and it has distorted the scholarly view of both the career of the Damascene and of the distinctive profile of the 'Melkite' community in Syria/Palestine in its origins. For John of Damascus belonged to the world of Islam. He flourished as a writer and churchman in the era inaugurated by the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (66/685–86/705), the period of the first literary expression of the controversies between Muslims and Christians. It was also the era in which the Christian communities in the world of Islam formulated what would become their standard positions in response to their own mutual recriminations of one another in the areas of heresiography and Christology. Accordingly, it makes much better sense to read the works of John of Damascus from the view point of his own milieu and that of his adversaries and admirers in the next generation in Syria/Palestine, rather than exclusively against the intellectual horizon of Constantinople, where there was a tendency to consider him 'Saracen-minded'.

Tel Aviv University; Tel Aviv, 1992; S. H. Griffith, "Anthony David of Baghdad, Scribe and Monk of Mar Sabas; Arabic in the monasteries of Palestine", *Church History* 58, 1989, pp. 7–19.

³⁵ See R. P. Blake, "La littérature grecque en Palestine au VIII^e siècle", *Le Muséon* 78, 1965, pp. 367–80; C. Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine after the Arab Conquest", in G. Cavallo *et al.* eds, *Scrittura, Libri e Testi nelle Aree Provinciali di Bisanzio*, vol. I, Spoleto, 1991, pp. 149–60; A. Cameron, "The Eastern Provinces in the 7th Century AD, Hellenism and the emergence of Islam", in S. Said ed., 'ΕΛΛΗΝΙΣΜΟΣ: *quelques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 25–27 octobre 1989, Leiden, 1991, pp. 287–313.

³⁶ See the Greek text published in I. Pomialovskii, *Žitie izhe vo sviatykh ottsa nashogo Feodora Archiepiskopa Edesskago*, St Petersburg, 1892. For the Arabic recension see Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire*, vol. II, tome 2, 750–X^e s., p. 162. See also Y. Meimaris and A. Selim, "An Arabic Version of the Life of St Theodore of Edessa (ar-Raha) the Sabaite", *Graeco-Arabica* 2, 1983, pp. 113–7. The *Vita* is discussed in A. Vasiliev,

John of Damascus and the 'Melkites'

In the year 754 at the iconoclastic council of Hieria John of Damascus, under his family name of Maṣṣūr, was anathematized and described as being 'Saracen-minded', of having betrayed Christ, and of being an enemy of the Byzantine empire.³⁷ It is enough to make one wonder if the Byzantines had heard the story that circulated among the Muslims, according to which John's father, Sarjun (Sergius), the son of Maṣṣūr, had become a Muslim at the time of the conquest.³⁸ And even the 'Melkite' history attributed to Eutychius of Alexandria (264/877–329/940) put a distance between the Christian family of Maṣṣūr, along with their co-religionists (i.e., the 'Melkites') in Damascus at the time of its surrender to the invading Arabs, and the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*).³⁹ The text says:

When the siege had exhausted the people of Damascus, Maṣṣūr, the administrator (*āmīl*) of Damascus went up onto the eastern gate and talked with Khālīd ibn al-Walīd about granting a safe-conduct to him, to his relatives, to those with him, and to the people of Damascus, with the exception of the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*), so that he might open the gates of Damascus. Khālīd ibn al-Walīd responded to what he asked, and wrote out a safe-conduct for him. . . . Maṣṣūr accepted the document, and all of the combatants from among the Byzantines who escaped attached themselves to Heraclius in Antioch.⁴⁰

"The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa", *Byzantion* 16, 1942–3, pp. 165–225; A. Abel, "La portée apologetique de la 'Vie' de s. Théodore d'Edesse", *Byzantinoslavica* 10, 1949, pp. 229–40. See also S. H. Griffith, "The *Life of Theodore of Edessa*: history, hagiography and religious apologetics in Mar Saba Monastery in early Abbasid times", to appear in the published proceedings of the International Symposium, "The Sabaite Heritage, the Sabaite Factor in the Orthodox Church, Monastic life, Liturgy, Theology, Literature, Art and Archaeology (5th Century to the Present)", Jerusalem, Yad Yizhak Ben Zvi, 24–30 May, 1998.

³⁷ See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, vol. XIII, cols 352–6, 576, 718–9.

³⁸ See the passage to this effect cited from Ibn 'Asākir's *History of Damascus* in R. Le Coz, *Jean Damascène. écrits sur l'Islam* (*Sources Chrétiennes* 383), Paris, 1992, p. 47, n. 3.

³⁹ While Muslim texts refer to the Byzantines as *al-Rūm*, and sometimes use the term for the Melkites as well, in Christian texts the term always refers to the Byzantines or other Westerners, and the Arabophone Christians of the Islamic world who also accept the teachings of the councils of Byzantine orthodoxy regularly go under the name *Malakiyya*. See S. K. Samir, "Quelques notes sur les termes *rūm* et *rūmī* dans la tradition arabe; étude de sémantique historique", in *La Nozione di "Romano" tra Cittadinanza e Universalità, Atti del il Seminario Internazionale di Studi Storici, "Da Roma alla Terza Roma," 21–23 Aprile 1982*, 1984, pp. 461–78. See also C. Charon, "L'origine ethnographique des melkites", *Échos d'Orient* 11, 1908, pp. 35–40, 82–91. Nevertheless, a Muslim writer, such as the historian al-Ṭabarī has no hesitation to speak of 'Sarjūn ibn Maṣṣūr al-Rūmī', who he says was the secretary of the Caliph Mu'āwiya. See L. Caetani (ed.), *Annali dell'Islam*, vol. III, dall'anno 13 al 17 H., Milan, 1910, pp. 375–6.

⁴⁰ L. Cheikho et al. eds, *Eutychii Patriarchae Alexandrini Annales* (CSCO 50, 51), Beirut and Paris, 1906 and 1909, vol. 51, pp. 15–16.

The point is that while the iconoclastic government of Emperor Constantine V (741–75) had reason enough to vilify John of Damascus as the most effective apologist for the veneration of the icons in the Greek language, the reality was that John did belong to the world of the Muslims; his family played a role in the surrender of Damascus to the Arabs, and they were prominent proponents of the theology of Maximus the Confessor in the world of Islam. These facts would have lent themselves readily to the purposes of any Byzantine bent on invective against him. What is more, one might say that in his own world, Arabic writers, both Muslim and ‘Melkite’, had no difficulty in assimilating John and his family to themselves, in contradistinction to the Byzantines (*al-Rūm*), precisely because he was at home among them. The iconographer who first portrayed John in turban and oriental demeanor had the right instinct about him.⁴¹ He did belong to the world of Islam.

What is known with any assurance about the biography of John of Damascus is soon told, although there is still a considerable divergence of opinion among scholars about the details.⁴² For the present purpose

⁴¹ See G. Kaster, “Johannes von Damaskus”, in W. Braunfels ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. VII, Rome and Freiburg, 1974, cols 102–4. See the eleventh century icon from Sinai of John of Damascus and Ephraem the Syrian in K. Weitzmann, *The Icon; holy images—sixth to fourteenth century*, New York, 1978, pl. 43, p. 124.

⁴² Among the more influential biographical essays one might list the following: M. Jugie, “Jean Damascène (saint)”, in A. Vacant et al., *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. VIII, Paris, 1947, cols 695–751; J. Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas: son époque, sa vie, son oeuvre*, Harissa, 1950; J. M. Hoeck, “Stand und Aufgaben der Damaskenos-Forschung”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 17, 1951, pp. 5–60; J.-M. Sauget, “Giovanni Damasceno, santo”, *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, vol. VI, Rome, 1965, cols 732–9; B. Studer, “Jean Damascène or de Damas (saint)”, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. VIII, Paris, 1974, cols 452–66; B. Kotter, “Johannes von Damaskus (c. 650–?)”, in H. R. Balz et al. eds, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XVII, Berlin and New York, 1988, pp. 127–32; D. J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam, the ‘Heresy of the Ishmaelites’*, Leiden, 1972; Le Coz, *Écrits sur l’Islam*. Underlying the rather fulsome hagiographical tradition in Greek there seems to have been an original Arabic life of John of Damascus. It survives in a re-worked recension by a monk named Michael from the monastery of Mar Sem’an near Antioch in the year 1084; see C. Bacha, *Biographie de Saint Jean Damascène; texte original arabe*, Harissa, 1912. The Arabic text was translated into German by G. Graf, “Das arabische Original der Vita des hl. Johannes von Damaskus”, *Der Katholik* 93, 1913, pp. 164–90, 320–1. It now seems that this Arabic life itself rests upon an older one composed before the year 969, which has survived in part in a Greek text by Patriarch John VII of Jerusalem (951–64); see B. Hemmerdinger, “La Vita arabe de saint Jean Damascène et BHG 884”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 28, 1962, pp. 422–3; B. Flusin, “De l’arabe au grec, puis au géorgien, une vie de saint Jean Damascène”, in G. Contamine ed., *Traduction et traducteurs au moyen âge*, Paris, 1989, pp. 51–61. The whole subject of John of Damascus’ life and career calls urgently for re-examination; see especially M.-F. Auzépy, “De la Palestine à Constantinople”, esp. pp. 193–204.

one might simply report the current consensus that John was born in Damascus in the family of Maṣṣūr in the third quarter of the first/seventh century, perhaps around the year 675. He was raised in Damascus, and Arab Christian lore customarily puts him into an adolescent association with the future caliph Yazīd I (61/680–64/683), as well as with al-Akhṭal (c. 20/640–c. 92/710), the Christian poet from the tribe of Taghlīb, whom the historian Henri Lammens, echoing a reported remark of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik, styled, '*le chantre des Omiades*'.⁴³ Clearly the effort here is to highlight John's Arab connections, although there are those scholars who doubt that the saint ever even knew any Arabic.⁴⁴ Similarly, his biographers surmise that John, following family tradition, must have entered government service as a young man, and that he stayed in the caliph's employ at least until the time of the reforms of al-Walīd (87/705–97/715), or the Islamicizing campaign of 'Umar II (97/715–102/720). Most commentators on John's biography suppose that he came to Jerusalem, and to Mar Sabas monastery, in 'Umar II's reign, when he would have been around forty years old. In due course, Patriarch John V (705–735) ordained John of Damascus a priest, and he carried on a career as a monk and, most notably, as a writer.⁴⁵ He wrote exclusively in Greek, but the issues he addressed were those of importance to the indigenous Christians of the Islamic world. By the fourth/tenth century the most important of his works were being translated into Arabic.⁴⁶

John of Damascus became the most effective defender of the Chalcedonian cause in the east, particularly against the theological claims of the Jacobites, although in modern Western scholarship the mention of his name evokes most readily his role in the iconoclast controversy. The date of John's death, like all of the other biographical data, is uncertain. In all probability he was dead by the year 754.⁴⁷

⁴³ H. Lammens, "Le Chantre des Omiades, notes bibliographiques et littéraires sur le poète arabe chrétien Akṭal," *Journal Asiatique*, 9th series 4, 1894, pp. 94–176, 193–241, 381–459; see also Nasrallah, *Saint Jean de Damas*, pp. 43–7.

⁴⁴ See the remarks of Gérard Troupeau reported by Le Coz, *Écrits sur l'Islam*, p. 51, n. 2.

⁴⁵ For the works of John of Damascus see A. Kallis, "Handapparat sum Johannes-Damaskenos-Studium", *Ostkirchliche Studien* 16, 1967, pp. 200–13; M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum*, vol. III, Turnhout, 1979, pp. 511–36.

⁴⁶ See A. S. Atiya, "St. John Damascene: survey of the unpublished Arabic versions of his works in Sinai", in G. Makdisi ed., *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb*, Cambridge, MS, 1965, pp. 73–83. See also G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, 5 vols, Vatican City, 1944–53, vol. I, pp. 377–9.

⁴⁷ See Le Coz, *Écrits sur l'Islam*, p. 57.

From the perspective of the emerging 'Melkite' identity, John of Damascus was almost a paradigmatic character; he was an apologist for the faith of Chalcedon, who was firmly rooted in the social world of the new Arab hegemony, while at the same time he was thoroughly schooled in the Greek learning of his ecclesial community. His work represents if not the last, perhaps the most notable efflorescence of ecclesiastical Hellenism in the Islamic world. But he wrote very much in view of the local problems of the patriarchate of Jerusalem, and not with his eye primarily fixed on Constantinople and the troubles of Byzantium, as modern scholars seem almost automatically to assume. The fact that most of his works, with the exception of the tracts on the veneration of the icons, received little or no attention in Byzantium until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries itself suggests that before that time John's particular theological purposes had little immediate relevance there.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, commentators often speak of the writings of John of Damascus almost solely in reference to theology in Byzantium, where many years after their composition a number of his works did come to have an enormous circulation. Contrariwise, discussions of John of Damascus and the Islamic world usually centre on the only two works attributed to him having explicitly to do with Islam: a chapter (100/101) in the *De Haeresibus*, and a work entitled *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni*, which is also attributed in the manuscript tradition to Theodore Abū Qurra.⁴⁹ But the fact of the matter is that these two works are minor ones, and even their authenticity is disputable. They present a view of Islam which John of Damascus himself would have had every reason to know to be wrong and to be polemically inspired.⁵⁰ John's major works are actually the ones which have most to do with the Islamic milieu and with the shaping of the presentation of Melkite orthodoxy in that milieu as it would unfold for generations to come in both Greek and Arabic. To put the accent on this reading of his works in general we may consider here very briefly three groups of them, which in fact reflect his principal intellectual concerns: the *Pege Gnoseos*; the orations against the calumniators of the icons; and several works against local theological adversaries. The purpose is to emphasize their relevance to the immediate concerns of the Chalcedonians living in the Islamic world, and hence their role in shaping the Melkite identity.

⁴⁸ See B. Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise des Johannes von Damaskus*, Ettal, 1956, p. 131.

⁴⁹ See the discussions in Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam*; Le Coz, *Écrits sur l'Islam*. See also D. Sahas, "The Arab Character of the Christian Disputation with Islam: the case of John of Damascus (c. 655–c. 749)", in B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner eds, *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien*, vol. IV, Wiesbaden, 1992, pp. 185–205.

⁵⁰ See the seldom cited but very interesting study by P. Khoury, "Jean Damascène et l'Islam", *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 7, 1957, pp. 44–63; 8, 1958, pp. 313–39.

1. The *Pege Gnoseos*

Although modern editions often present John of Damascus' three works, the *Dialectica*, the *De Haeresibus*, and the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, bound together as three parts of a trilogy, the *Pege Gnoseos*, it is clear that there is no basis in the manuscript tradition for this collocation of the works.⁵¹ In fact they often circulated separately, or two of them, the *Dialectica* and the *De Fide Orthodoxa* were bound together to compose the so-called *150 Chapters*. Nevertheless, it is clear from John's letter to Cosmas of Maiouma (c. 675–c. 752), which serves as the introduction to the assembled *Pege Gnoseos*, that the author thought of these works together, and that ultimately the idea of presenting them together is genuinely his. What unites them is a singleness of purpose: to put forward the orthodox faith, that is to say the faith of the first six Councils of Byzantine orthodoxy, together with a careful definition of terms, and the clear designation of the adversaries, in a summary fashion, which relies almost entirely on the 'cut and paste' method of quoting liberally from earlier works of the 'Orthodox Fathers'. John himself states this methodology in the letter to Cosmas, and indeed boasts that none of the ideas in the three works are originally his, a claim with which scholarly commentators over the years have found themselves largely in agreement. John says, 'I shall add nothing of my own, but shall gather together into one those things which have been worked out by the most eminent of teachers and make a compendium of them.'⁵²

As Basil Studer puts it a number of times, John's 'principal interest was in the exposition and the proclamation of the orthodox faith'.⁵³ It was an interest which he shared with other writers and compilers of the first/seventh and second/eighth centuries, most notably with the composer of the *Doctrina Patrum*.⁵⁴ What made John of Damascus' work stand out was its comprehensiveness and its economy, that is to say, his talent for finding just the right expressions of the point at issue to include among the summary statements he was assembling. What conditioned and elicited this concern for summation and concision was the social circumstance in which John and his 'Melkite' co-religionists

⁵¹ See Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise*, p. 18. Look for the forthcoming doctoral dissertation of V. Contournas, Paris, the Sorbonne. The most recent modern, critical edition is B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*: I, *Institutio elementaris, capita philosophica*; II, *Expositio Fidei*; IV, *Liber de haeresibus, opera polemica*, Berlin and New York, 1969, 1973, 1981.

⁵² F. H. Chase, Jr., trans., *Saint John of Damascus: writings, The Fathers of the Church*, New York, 1958, p. 6. See also Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise*, p. 20.

⁵³ Studer, *Die theologische Arbeitsweise*, p. 51.

⁵⁴ See F. Diekamp, *Doctrina Patrum de Incarnatione Verbi; ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, Münster in W., 1907.

lived. It was, simply put, the major social and cultural circumstance of the Islamic world aborning in its first great era of self assertion. Here not only were Muslims making their first efforts at public self-definition (in the new milieu of the conquest), but also Jews and the several Christian denominations living in these territories were all called upon to give a summary account of themselves, first of all to themselves, then to their adversaries among their own co-religionists, and then subsequently to the Muslim authorities and their intellectual establishment. For John of Damascus, the Muslims themselves and their characteristic teachings were only an after-thought. His energies were taken up with the exposition of 'Melkite' orthodoxy.

That the works included in John of Damascus' *Pege Gnoseos* were seen by Christians living in the world of Islam as having a primary relevance to the controversies that divided them in that very milieu may be seen in the earliest independent reference to John's work of which we know. It is included in a letter written in Syriac by a man named Elias, to Leo, the *syncellus* of the 'Melkite' bishop of Ḥarrān. Elias' letter is an apologetic response to questions put to him by Leo regarding Elias' conversion to the faith of the 'Jacobites'.⁵⁵ In it he refers to works in John of Damascus' *Pege Gnoseos*. He speaks of 'the 150 chapters which [John] composed for the sake of debate and as an apology for your teaching'.⁵⁶ What is more, Elias mentions the works of two other Chalcedonian teachers which he consulted, texts by George of Martyropolis and Constantine of Ḥarrān, who flourished just before the time of John of Damascus' literary career, in the late first/seventh or early second/eighth centuries.⁵⁷ In none of these texts, Elias said, did he find any arguments sufficiently strong to dissuade him from his newly assumed 'Jacobite' views.

There is some controversy over the identity of Elias the letter-writer. There are those who have proposed to identify him with Elias, the 'Jacobite' Patriarch of Antioch (709–22), a position which would put the earliest reference to parts of the *Pege Gnoseos* as early as the late 720s.⁵⁸ Albert van Roey, supposing that John of Damascus' text could not have been composed until after 743 because of its introductory let-

⁵⁵ See A. van Roey, "La Lettre apologétique d'Élie à Léon, syncelle de l'évêque chalcédonien de Harran; une apologie monophysite du VIII^e-IX^e siècle", *Le Muséon* 57, 1944, pp. 1–52.

⁵⁶ Van Roey, "La Lettre apologétique", p. 8, n. 22.

⁵⁷ A. van Roey, "Trois auteurs chalcédoniens syriens: Georges de Martyropolis, Constantin et Léon de Ḥarran", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 3, 1972, pp. 125–53.

⁵⁸ See the forthcoming study by V. Contournas, who favours the identification with Elias the patriarch, with the regnal years of 706–28.

ter to Cosmas of Maiouma, who was consecrated only in that year, suggests that Elias' letter must have been written between 743 and the beginning of the third/ninth century.⁵⁹ Whichever of these positions regarding Elias' identity and the date of his *floruit* will prove to be more likely, the fact remains that the earliest known reference to John of Damascus' major work puts it firmly in the context of the Christian denominational controversies of the second/eighth century within the world of Islam, which were being conducted in Greek and Syriac. This is not to say that such is the only point of reference for the *Pege Gnoseos*, but it does corroborate the *a priori* likelihood that one should look first to John's own social context and its requirements for the more immediate purposes of the work's component parts. On this view, one concludes that John composed the work precisely to argue the case for the orthodoxy of the teaching of the first six Councils, as the Byzantines enumerated them, in the Islamic world of the second/eighth century, where the principal adversaries were 'Nestorians', 'Jacobites', Monotheletes, and even the 'Manichaean' views of some intellectuals who for a time were to get a new lease on life under the rule of the Arabs in the early Islamic period. As such the *Pege Gnoseos* became an important statement of theological identity for 'Melkites', and its theological formulations and arguments were to have a long life in Arabic dress, not only in translations of the work itself, but principally in the compositions of Arabophone writers of the next generations, such as Theodore Abū Qurra, who has been aptly called '*un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène*'.⁶⁰ In due course the *Pege Gnoseos* came to the Byzantine world, and even to the Latin west, where it achieved the success which made it famous well beyond the world within which it was composed.⁶¹ But its first purpose was summarily to define the 'Melkite' theological identity within the world of Islam; the component compositions were written without reference to Constantinople.

More than a decade ago Shlomo Pines called attention to the fact that the compositional pattern of the early Islamic *kalām* works, particularly those of the Mu'tazilites, match the order of topics as they are presented in John of Damascus' *De Fide Orthodoxa*. He wrote:

In all the texts that have been cited, . . . the first section deals with the sources of knowledge. The exposition of theological doctrine begins in

⁵⁹ Van Roey, "La Lettre apologétique", p. 21.

⁶⁰ I. Dick, "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Harran", *Proche Orient Chrétien* 12, 1962, pp. 209–23, 319–32; 13, 1963, pp. 114–29.

⁶¹ See B. Kotter, *Die Überlieferung des Pege Gnoseos des hl. Johannes von Damaskos* (*Studia Patristica et Byzantina* 5), Ettal, 1959.

all these texts with the demonstration that the world, i.e., all things directly known to man are created and must have a Creator. This proof is followed by an argumentation proving that God is one, which is succeeded by a discussion of the question of what God is or may be said to be; this involves the problem of the divine attributes.⁶²

Pines concluded that inasmuch as the conventional compositional pattern of the works of Islamic *kalām* mirrored the order of topical exposition in such works as the *De Fide Orthodoxa*, and even its methods of reasoning, the conventions of Muslim scholars 'reflected to a considerable extent those employed (in writing or in oral instruction) by Christian theologians who lived in the Islamic empire'.⁶³ He is not so much claiming a direct influence as pointing out the fact that the Muslim thinkers to some degree may be seen to have joined a conversation that was already under way. But by John of Damascus' day it was also already a conversation to be found in both Christian and Muslim milieus.

2. *Orations Against the Calumniators of the Icons*

Almost all the scholarly discussion of John of Damascus' *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons*⁶⁴ has looked exclusively to Byzantium and to the iconoclastic policies of the emperors Leo III and Constantine V to explain them. But one recent scholar has called attention to the fact that John's orations were not addressed to Christians in Byzantium, but in the first place to those living in the patriarchate of Jerusalem. Dietrich Stein writes:

The public to whom John of Damascus directed himself is to be sought among the Melkite Christians outside of the empire, with whom John numbered himself. The icon orations are testimonials for the discussion about icons and their veneration outside of the empire's territory.⁶⁵

By the time John of Damascus took up his pen on behalf of the Christian practice of venerating the icons, presumably well after his arrival in the patriarchate of Jerusalem during the caliph 'Umar II's (97/715–102/720) reign, Islamic policies against Christian crosses and icons, as well as the caliphal campaign to remove them from public

⁶² S. Pines, "Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing in Relation to Moslem *Kalām* and to Jewish Thought", *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of the Sciences and the Humanities* 5, 1976, pp. 112–13.

⁶³ Pines, "Some Traits of Christian Theological Writing", p. 115.

⁶⁴ B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. III, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores Oraciones Tres*, Berlin and New York, 1973.

⁶⁵ D. Stein, *Der Beginn des byzantinischen Bilderstreites und seine Entwicklung bis in die 40er Jahre des 8. Jahrhunderts*, München, 1980, p. 211.

view in favour of the display of the symbols of Islam, were well under way. These measures culminated in the famous decree of the caliph Yazīd II (102/720–106/724) ordering the destruction of religious images even within Christian churches.⁶⁶ And the issue comes up as well in Muslim polemical tracts reporting encounters between Muslim and Christian spokesmen of the period, in which Christians are accused of idolatry because of their veneration of crosses and icons. One might mention in this connection the anonymous Muslim polemical pamphlet which is now thought to have been part of the alleged correspondence between Emperor Leo III and the caliph 'Umar II, as well as the account of the debate between Leo III and the captive Muslim *mutakallim*, Wāṣil al-Dimashqī.⁶⁷ What is more, it is from this period that there comes the evidence of the purposefully defaced images in a number of floor mosaics in churches in the patriarchate of Jerusalem. The damage seems to have been done precisely in reaction to Islamic charges of idolatry, particularly in instances when Muslims used Christian premises for their own worship services.⁶⁸ Finally, it was in the first half of the second/eighth century that the Islamic traditions about images and image-makers were finding their first expression.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ See A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 and 10, 1956, pp. 23–47. For the context of this edict see S. H. Griffith, "Images, Islam and Christian Icons". For a different view see P. Speck, "Was für Bilder eigentlich? neue Überlegungen zu den Bilderedikt des Kalifen Yazīd", *Le Muséon* 109, 1996, pp. 267–78.

⁶⁷ See D. Sourdel, "Un pamphlet musulman anonyme d'époque 'Abbaside contre les chrétiens", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 34, 1966, pp. 1–33; J.-M. Gaudel, "The Correspondence between Leo and 'Umar; 'Umar's Letter re-discovered?", *Islamochristiana* 10, 1984, pp. 109–57. See also S. H. Griffith, "Bashīr/Bēšēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor III; the Islamic recension of his story in *Leiden Oriental MS* 951(2)", *Le Muséon* 103, 1990, pp. 293–327.

⁶⁸ See M. Piccirillo and T. Aṭhiyat, "The Complex of Saint Stephen at Umm er-Rasas-Kastron Mefaa", *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30, 1986, pp. 341–51, 500–9; M. Piccirillo, "Le Iscrizioni di Um er-Rasas-Kastron Mefaa in Giordania I (1986–7)", *Liber Annuus, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* 37, 1987, pp. 177–239; *idem*, "Le Chiese e i Mosaici di Um er-Rasas-Kastron Mefaa in Giordania", *Milieu* 1, 1988, pp. 177–200; *idem*, "Les Églises paléo-chrétiennes d'Umm er-Rasas (Jordanie): cinq campagnes de fouilles", *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes Rendus*, 1991, pp. 273–94. See also R. Schick's forthcoming article, "Is 718 A.D. the Correct Date of the Mosaic in the Nave of the Church of Saint Stephen at Umm al-Rasas, Jordan?". The issue of the damaged floor mosaics in eighth-century churches in Palestine and Jordan is discussed at length in R. Schick, *The Christian Communities of Palestine from Byzantine to Islamic Rule; a historical and archaeological study (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* 2), Princeton, 1995, pp. 180–219. The possibility that some of these churches may have been used for Muslim worship is suggested by the work of S. Bashear, "Qibla Musharriqa and Early Muslim Prayer in Churches", *The Muslim World* 81, 1991, pp. 267–82.

⁶⁹ See R. Paret, "Die Entstehungszeit des islamischen Bilderverbots", *Kunst des Orients*

The Syriac account of a debate between a monk of Bēt Ḥālē in Iraq and a Muslim notable in the entourage of Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik seems to be the earliest Christian record of an exchange with Muslims about crosses and icons and their veneration. In the Islamic milieu, unlike in Byzantium, there is a virtual identification of cross and icon in terms of the veneration they receive, and the apologetic emphasis is put on the significance of the public act of honour or worship paid to them. The monk of Bēt Ḥālē put it this way:

Anyone who is a Christian, but he does not worship the cross, like someone who will not look upon the Messiah, he is truly lost from life. When we worship the cross, we are not worshipping it as wood, or iron, or brass, or gold, or silver. Rather, we are worshipping our Lord the Messiah, God the Word, who dwells in the temple from among us, and in this banner of victory.⁷⁰

John of Damascus’ *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons* address the same challenge which faced the monk of Bēt Ḥālē, with the difference that in John’s milieu some Christians themselves were shying away from the traditional veneration paid to icons, due to the policies of rulers hostile to the practice. There has been some scholarly controversy about the dating of the *Orations*, but recent opinion puts all three of them late in John’s career, between the years 741 and 750.⁷¹

In search of the occasion for the composition of the first *Oration*, there is no compelling reason in the text to refer in the first place to the iconoclastic edicts of the emperor Leo III in Byzantium in 726 or 730, as most commentators do.⁷² John himself says simply,

I am stirred to speak the more vehemently, for the commanding words of a king must be fearful to his subjects. Yet few men can be found who know enough to despise the evil laws of kings, even though the authority of earthly monarchs does come from above.⁷³

11, 1976–7, pp. 158–81; D. van Reenen, “The *Bilderverbot*, a new survey”, *Der Islam* 67, 1990, pp. 27–77.

⁷⁰ Diyarbakir Syriac MS 95, typescript, p. 12.

⁷¹ See P. Schreiner, “Der byzantinische Bilderstreit: kritische Analyse der zeitgenössischen Meinungen und das Urteil der Nachwelt bis Heute”, in *Bisanzio, Roma e l’Italia nell’alto Medioevo*, vol. I (*Settimani di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull’alto Medioevo* 34), Spoleto, 1988, p. 325. Schreiner accepts the conclusions reached by P. Speck, *Artabados, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren; Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabados und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie*, Bonn, 1981, pp. 179–243.

⁷² In the introductory discussion of dating in his edition of the *Orations*, Bonifatius Kotter retains this conventional point of reference; see Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, pp. 5–7. But see also the objections of D. Stein, *Der Beginn des Bilderstreites*, pp. 204–12.

⁷³ Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 66. The English translation is by

Why should not the 'king' be the caliph, whose authority alone was in a position to threaten the Christians in the patriarchate of Jerusalem? Yazīd II had issued an iconoclastic edict in July, 721.⁷⁴ John averred: 'It is disastrous to suppose that the Church does not know God as He really is; that she has degenerated into idolatry,'⁷⁵ precisely the charge Muslim polemicists pressed. And he goes on to state: 'I boldly draw an image of the invisible God, not as invisible, but as having become visible for our sakes by partaking of flesh and blood,'⁷⁶ which is a statement directly affirming the major point of friction between Muslims and Christians which the icons graphically proclaimed.⁷⁷ Moreover, in the first oration John proceeds to link the veneration of icons with honour paid to the saints and their bodies, and to other Christian practices such as the manner of Baptism, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the custom of facing east to pray, all of which were standard topics in Christian/Muslim arguments about religion. He even mentions the famous image of Christ at Edessa and the sign of the cross, both of which were also mentioned in the dialogue of the monk of Bēt Ḥālē and the Muslim notable.⁷⁸

John certainly refers to iconoclasm in Byzantium in the second Oration. He names both the patriarch Germanus I (715–30) and the emperor Leo III (717–41).⁷⁹ In fact the burden of the second Oration seems to be to defuse the potentially damaging effects of the imperial Byzantine policy of iconoclasm on the apologetic posture of the Christians in the caliphate, in that John makes a point of putting the Emperor in his place. He says,

If an angel or an emperor teaches you anything contrary to what you have received, close your ears. . . . What right have emperors to style

D. Anderson, *St John of Damascus 'On the Divine Images'*, Crestwood, NY, 1980, p. 13. Anderson based his translation of the text of the Orations in PG 94, cols 1231–420.

⁷⁴ See Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict", pp. 46–7.

⁷⁵ Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 66; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 78; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., the incident cited in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, in which al-Asbagh, the nephew of 'Abd al-Malik, having entered a monastery church in Egypt, spat in the face of an icon of the Virgin and Child, and said, 'Who is Christ that you worship him as God?'; B. Evetts, "History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria" (*Patrologia Orientalis* 5), Turnhout, 1909, p. (306 =) 52. In the Oration John of Damascus went on to say, 'You who refuse to bow before images also refuse to bow before the Son of God who is the living image of the invisible God, and His unchanging likeness', Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 107; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, p. 28.

⁷⁸ See the unpublished Diyarbakir Syriac MS 95, typescript, p. 13.

⁷⁹ See Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, pp. 103 and 113; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, pp. 60 and 63.

themselves lawgivers in the Church? . . . Emperors have not preached the word to you, but apostles and prophets, shepherds and teachers. . . . Political prosperity is the business of emperors; the condition of the church is the concern of shepherds and teachers.⁸⁰

It makes sense to assume that when the Byzantine iconoclastic policy became known in the Melkite patriarchate of Jerusalem, it would have strengthened the hand of those Christians in the caliphate already given to iconophobia as a result of Islamic polemics. Leo's edicts, therefore, would have exacerbated the problems of the church authorities in Jerusalem and they may well have, as John said about his second Oration, 'urged me to write it because the first treatise was not altogether decisive for many'.⁸¹ And one notices in it an increased attention to the veneration of the cross, a practice allowed by Byzantine iconoclasts, as a warrant for the veneration of icons. John states emphatically, 'There has been an unwritten tradition throughout the world to make icons of Christ, the incarnate God, and of the saints, to bow down before the cross, and to pray facing the east'.⁸² The themes fit perfectly with the apologies written in Syriac and Arabic within the caliphate.

Likewise, the third Oration continues and deepens the thinking of the previous two compositions: the importance of the unwritten traditions and liturgical usages in the church, the authority of the Fathers, the integrity of all the aspects of orthodox life. So much is this the case that Bonifatius Kotter, the editor of the recent critical edition of the orations, presents them together in one text, as parts of a single composite, revised and expanded work.⁸³ Here is not the place to study this fascinating work in detail, beyond making the appeal that it be read against the background of events in the caliphate as well as in reference to developments in Byzantium. But in this connection one might say in passing that even theological commentators have noticed that John of Damascus is slightly out of step with the other standard Byzantine theologians of the holy icons. One commentator, for example, speaks of him as 'the most 'oriental' of the iconodules'.⁸⁴ He means that there are ambiguities in John's thought by comparison with the iconology of the other Byzantine thinkers. In particular John seems to pay less attention to the theoretical resemblance between icon and pro-

⁸⁰ Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, pp. 73, 103; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, pp. 53 and 59–60.

⁸¹ Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 69; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, p. 50.

⁸² Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, p. 114, also p. 118; Anderson, *St John of Damascus*, p. 63 also p. 64.

⁸³ See the introductory remarks, Kotter, *Contra Imaginum Calumniatores*, pp. 23–4.

⁸⁴ C. von Schönborn, *L'Icone du Christ*, 2nd edn, Fribourg, 1976, p. 197.

totype than he does to what one might call the practical issue of the actual participation in the grace of the divine for which the icon presents the opportunity.⁸⁵ In other words, it is precisely the cult of the icon which John of Damascus defends, the public act of *proskynesis*. And this was precisely the point at issue between Muslims and Christians in their religious confrontations over crosses and icons.

After John of Damascus, iconoclasm and the effects of the polemical reproach for idolatry continued to be a problem for the Christians in the patriarchate of Jerusalem. At the time of the iconoclast synod of 754, Patriarch Theodore (745–67) allegedly wrote a letter containing his affirmation of the orthodox faith as expressed in the previous six ecumenical Councils, in which he included a strong endorsement of the veneration of the icons of Christ and the saints.⁸⁶ In 760 there was reportedly a local synod in Jerusalem in connection with the icon problem.⁸⁷ Theophanes claims in his *Chronography* that in 764 the oriental patriarchs excommunicated a bishop near Apamea in Syria, who had 'apostasized from the orthodox faith and came into accord with Constantine's heretical opposition to the holy icons'.⁸⁸ He means the Byzantine emperor Constantine V (741–75). But there must have been a local anti-icon party of Christians with whom the bishop could ally himself if his actions were to have any effect.

It was known in Constantinople that Christians in the caliphate had to contend with opposition from Muslims over the veneration of the holy icons, and that John of Damascus was a champion of the iconophiles. Around the year 767, in a sermon to a crowd of monks, the martyr St Stephen the Younger spoke of the opposition to the policies of the emperor Constantine V which came from around the Christian world. Among the opponents he mentioned the leading men of Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria. He said,

They not only cursed and anathematized the loathsome doctrine of the icon-burners, but they never ceased in defamatory letters to show contempt for the impious emperor giving assent to it, calling him an apostate and a heresiarch. Among them was the most honorable and wise priest, John of Damascus, who was called Manṣūr by this tyrant, but

⁸⁵ See Schönborn, *L'Icone*, pp. 191–9; also the remarks of T. Nikolaou, "Die Ikonenverehrung als Beispiel ostkirchlicher Theologie und Frömmigkeit nach Johannes von Damaskos", *Ostkirchliche Studien* 25, 1976, pp. 138–65.

⁸⁶ See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, vol. XII, cols 1135–46, esp. cols 1143–6. The letter was not actually read until the Council of 787.

⁸⁷ See Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio*, vol. XII, cols 679–80.

⁸⁸ C. de Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, 2 vols, Leipzig, 1883–5, vol. I, pp. 433–4. Translation from H. Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, Philadelphia, 1932, p. 123.

who for us is a pious, God-fearing man. He never ceased writing to him calling him contentious, Muḥammad, icon-burner, saint-hater, and the beclouded bishops under him slaves of the belly and gluttons.⁸⁹

By the year 787 and the Council of Nicea II, Jerusalem and the other oriental patriarchates were virtually cut off from effective communication with Byzantium. By then the effects of the 'Abbasid revolution had run their course and the focal point of Islamic power had shifted from Syria to Iraq. News of the Council does not even seem to have arrived in the east until well into the tenth century.⁹⁰ As for the controversy over the icons, one may say that by the end of the second half of the eighth century, it had gone separate ways in Byzantium and in the territories of the caliphate. In the caliphate the veneration of the cross and the icons remained a controversial topic in the confrontation between Muslims and Christians.

Within the world of Islam, Theodore Abū Qurra, in the first decade of the third/ninth century, wrote the most comprehensive tract in defence of the practice of venerating icons. He wrote it in Arabic, for a generation of Christians who even in the Melkite community had lost all effective contact with Byzantium. The occasion for the composition of the tract was a pastoral problem in the environs of Abū Qurra's see city of Ḥarrān, only some twenty kilometres from Edessa, where the Church of the Icon of Christ was in the care of the Melkite community. In fact, Abū Qurra wrote the tract at the request of an ecclesiastical official named Yanna at this church, who had informed him that 'many Christians are abandoning the prostration to the icon of Christ our God.'⁹¹ Abū Qurra described the problem as follows:

Anti-Christians, especially ones claiming to have in hand a scripture sent down from God, are reprimanding them for their prostration to these icons, and because of it they are imputing to them the worship of idols,

⁸⁹ Quoted from the *Vita* of St Stephen the Younger, written in 808 by Stephen the Deacon of Constantinople, *PG* 100, cols 1117D–20A. At the Council of 754 John of Damascus was called Maṣṣūr, and described as 'Saracen-minded'. See the discussion of the *Vita* of St Stephen the Younger in I. Ševčenko, "Hagiography of the Iconoclast Period", in A. Bryer and J. Herrin eds, *Iconoclasm. Papers Given at the 9th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham, 1975*, Birmingham, 1977, pp. 113–31; reprinted in I. Ševčenko, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World*, London, 1982.

⁹⁰ See the discussion in S. H. Griffith, "Eutychius of Alexandria on the Emperor Theophilus and Iconoclasm in Byzantium; a tenth century moment in Christian apologetics in Arabic", *Byzantion* 52, 1982, pp. 154–190.

⁹¹ I. Dick, *Théodore Abūqurra, traité du culte des icônes (Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien 10)*, Jounieh and Rome, 1986, p. 87. See now the English translation of the treatise by Sidney H. Griffith, cited in n. 114 below.

and the transgression of what God commanded in the Torah and the Prophets, and they sneer at them.⁹²

Abu Qurra goes on to say that in response to Abba Yanna's request the purpose of his tract will be to:

Return the reproach to those who reproach us for something in which there is no reproach. We should bring the hearts of those frightened away from prostration to the holy icons back to the practice of prostration to them, in the orthodox way which our fathers established and approved.⁹³

Throughout the tract Abū Qurra follows a line of argument, the nucleus of which was present already in the dialogue of the monk of Bēt Ḥālē with the Muslim notable. However, he obviously owes a considerable debt to the thinking of his fellow 'Melkite', John of Damascus, whom he nevertheless never mentions by name.⁹⁴ Abū Qurra's own original contributions to the argument are seen in the adroit ways in which he amplifies the by then conventional line of John's thinking to fit the local circumstances, in which Jews and Muslims are the adversaries, along with those Christians whom, Abū Qurra charges, they have shamed away from venerating the icons. He makes no mention of iconoclasm in Byzantium.⁹⁵ Perhaps John of Damascus laid down the conventional line of thinking in his *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons*, in much the same circumstances as those Abū Qurra described in the next generation.

In a thought-provoking new study of the complex relationships between Palestine and Constantinople in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, Marie-France Auzépy has recently called attention to the puzzling silence about John of Damascus in almost all the documentary sources for the history of Mar Sabas monastery, and even of Jerusalem, in this time-frame. This fact, along with the civil and ecclesiastical politics of the Manṣūr family, and the scant attention paid to icons and their veneration by major figures in Palestine, such as the ascetic Stephen the Sabaite (c. 725–807), Cosmas the Melode (c. 675–c. 752), and Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807–21), have all conspired to help Auzépy form the hypothesis that on the question of the veneration of icons, John of Damascus and Theodore Abū Qurra may

⁹² Dick, *Traité du culte des icones*, p. 88.

⁹³ Dick, *Traité du culte des icones*, p. 88.

⁹⁴ It is not quite correct to say, 'The irony is that to Abu Qurra the triumph of John Damascene's defence of images at Nicaea II apparently remained unknown; the greatest Greek theologian of the period was known in far-off Constantinople, but not in his own country', A. Cameron, 'Hellenism and the Emergence of Islam', p. 309.

⁹⁵ See S. H. Griffith, 'Theodore Abū Qurrah's Arabic Tract on the Christian Practice of Venerating Images', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105, 1985, pp. 53–73.

have for a time belonged to a minority party even among the 'Melkites'.⁹⁶ Indeed, the present writer also recently ventured the opinion that it was perhaps due to his vigorous support of the icons that Abū Qurra was for a time deprived of his see of Ḥarrān by Patriarch Theodoret of Antioch (c. 785–799).⁹⁷ These observations call attention to the presence of an icon problem in the 'Melkite' community in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. But it is important to point out that the iconophobia of some 'Melkites' in the caliphate was of a different character from the iconoclasm of Byzantium. As for the noted refugee iconophiles from Palestine in the third/ninth century, such as Michael Syncellus, Theodore and Theophane Graptoi, it is Auzépy's thesis that their fame in Byzantium, as well as the renown of John of Damascus' *Orations against the Calumniators of the Icons*, derived from the prominence of the Chōra monastery in Constantinople after the year 843, where a resident 'Palestinian lobby' succeeded in imposing a revisionist history on the accounts of iconophilia in their homeland and iconoclasm in Byzantium.⁹⁸

3. Against 'Manichaeans', 'Nestorians' and 'Jacobites'

John of Damascus wrote a number of polemical tracts against the adversaries of his ecclesiastical denomination. Prominent among them are his tracts *Against the Jacobites*, the tract *On the Two Wills in Christ*, the tracts *Against the Nestorians*, the letter *On the Trishagion*, and the dialogue *Against the Manichaeans*.⁹⁹ Clearly they cover the primary polemical agenda of the Melkites, and as such they define those theological ideas in reaction to which the Melkite theological identity clarified and defined itself. They are all adversaries very much present to John of Damascus and his associates in Syria in the early Islamic period. There is no evidence that in the ensemble they preoccupied the ecclesiastics of Byzantium in the second/eighth century.

John wrote the *Contra Jacobitas* at the behest of Metropolitan Peter II of Damascus, who requested it for an unnamed Bishop of Dara in northern Mesopotamia in the heart of the Syriac-speaking Jacobite territory. Of Peter II of Damascus, Theophanes says the following in the entry of his *Chronography* for the year 742–3:

⁹⁶ See Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople", *passim*.

⁹⁷ See Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah, the Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer*, p. 32.

⁹⁸ See Auzépy, "De la Palestine à Constantinople", pp. 214–17.

⁹⁹ Kottler, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. IV, *Liber de haeresibus, opera polemica*, pp. 99–154, 155–232, 233–88, 289–332, 333–98.

Walid ordered the tongue of the holy metropolitan of Damascus, Peter, cut out because he openly condemned the impiety of the Arabs and Manichaeans. Then he exiled Peter to Arabia Felix, where he died: a martyr for Christ.¹⁰⁰

The earliest independent reference to the *Contra Jacobitas* is in the same Syriac letter of Elias, the Jacobite convert, to Leo, the 'Melkite' bishop of Ḥarrān, in which selections from the *Pege Gnoseos* appeared.¹⁰¹ Therefore, one can easily see the sort of role the *Contra Jacobitas* played in the interconfessional struggles of the Christian communities of the Arab world in the late Umayyad period.

Similarly, the tract *De duabus in Christo voluntatibus* speaks directly to the issue of the 'Monothelete'/'Dyothelete' schism within the Chalcedonian community in Syria in the second/eighth century of which Dionysius of Tell Mahrē spoke,¹⁰² that is the controversy between the 'Maronites' and the 'Melkites'. It had a much more significant and long-lasting social effect in the Islamic world than it did in Byzantium, in that from this controversy there emerged two Christian denominations which have persisted in opposition to one another ever since, the one with a largely Syriac patristic and liturgical heritage (the 'Maronites'), and the other with a major investment in Christian Hellenism (the 'Melkites').¹⁰³

The same may be said for the *Epistola de hymno trisagio*. It speaks to an issue of contention not only between 'Melkites' and 'Jacobites', but which in Syria separated the Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians in the second/eighth century. John of Damascus' letter on the subject is addressed to an Archimandrite named Jordan, who is otherwise unknown.¹⁰⁴ In the course of the letter the names of several other monks emerge, including that of Abba Anastasius of the Judean desert monastery of St Euthymius.¹⁰⁵ So one may legitimately suspect that the issue of the addition to the *Trishagion* was a significant one for the liturgical life of the monasteries in the Holy Land in the first half of the second/eighth century. This circumstance suggests that at this time, even in the monastic communities, the full 'Melkite' identity only gradually emerged.

Not much can be said about the tracts *Contra Nestorianos*. They are not addressed to any particular person, nor did any specific occasion evoke them. But in the caliphate 'Nestorians' were a constant presence, and after the rise of the 'Abbasids they at times enjoyed a prestige

¹⁰⁰ De Boor, *Theophanis Chronographia*, vol. I, p. 416; Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, p. 107.

¹⁰¹ See van Roey, "La Lettre apologetique d'Élie à Léon", pp. 8–12.

¹⁰² See above, n. 26.

¹⁰³ See Gribomont, "Documents sur les origines", esp. pp. 108–15.

¹⁰⁴ See Kotter, *Opera polemica*, p. 304.

¹⁰⁵ See Kotter, *Opera polemica*, p. 329.

among the Muslims which other Christian groups scarcely ever attained.¹⁰⁶ What is more, 'Melkites' were often accused by their 'Jacobite' adversaries of espousing doctrines which in their judgment amounted to little more than Nestorianism. So every 'Melkite' writer, beginning with John of Damascus, included arguments against Nestorians in their works.

It is significant that John of Damascus' tract *Contra Manichaeos* has survived in so few manuscripts, only a dozen, by comparison with the number of manuscripts in which most of the others have come down to us. Mani's teachings were in fact alive and well in the early Islamic period, not least among the intellectuals of the new elite among the Muslims.¹⁰⁷ But in the west, where John of Damascus' works circulated widely in the medieval period, Mani's teachings posed little or no immediate challenge.

The Jewish, Christian and Muslim debate with the Manichees in the early Islamic period involved not only the theoretical issue of dualism and the ontological status of good and evil, but the question of God's knowledge and foreknowledge of human actions, and the role of human freedom in the moral sphere.¹⁰⁸ These were major issues for the early Muslim *mutakallimūn*, and Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā, a contemporary of John of Damascus and the founder of record of the Mu'tazila, is himself said to have composed a work against the Manichees.¹⁰⁹ John's tract is in the form of a dialogue between an 'Orthodox' protagonist and a 'Manichaean' adversary. They discuss all the major issues that one would expect to find in such an encounter. While John is certainly dependent on earlier Christian writers for much of his material, he does not here name his sources and, in fact, his narrative is fresh and original in a way that suggests he is engaging in an active, contemporary debate. Significantly, the issue of Mani's teachings also appears in the *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* which is often attributed to John of Damascus (and to Theodore Abū Qurra), and many of the

¹⁰⁶ See L. Massignon, "La Politique islamochrétienne des scribes nestoriens de Deïr Qonna à la cour de Bagdad au IX^e siècle de notre ère", *Vivre et Penser*, 2nd series, 2, 1942, pp. 7-14, reprinted in Y. Moubarac ed., *Opera Minora*, 3 vols, Beirut, 1963, vol. I, pp. 250-7; see also B. Landron, *Chrétiens et musulmans en Irak: attitudes nestorienne vis-à-vis de l'islam, Études Chrétiennes Arabes*, Paris, 1994.

¹⁰⁷ See G. Vajda, "Les *zindigs* en pays d'islam au début de la période abbaside", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 17, 1938, pp. 173-229; C. Colpe, "Anpassung des Manichäismus an den Islam", *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 109, 1959, pp. 82-91; G. Vajda, "Le Témoignage d'al-Maturidi sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Daysanites et des Marcionites", *Arabica* 13, 1966, pp. 1-38, 113-28.

¹⁰⁸ See S. and G. G. Stroumsa, "Aspects of Anti-Manichaean Polemics in Late Antiquity and under Early Islam", *Harvard Theological Review* 81, 1988, pp. 37-58.

¹⁰⁹ Stroumsa, "Aspects of Anti-Manichaean Polemics," p. 52.

same arguments can also be found in Abū Qurra's tract *On Human Freedom*.¹¹⁰ The reaction to the teachings of Mani clearly was an important part of the 'Melkite' self-definition in the early Islamic period. What is more, the polemic against the 'Manichees' may also include both John's and Abū Qurra's reactions to certain themes in early Islam itself, in that modern scholars are evermore insistently pointing out the presence of 'Manichaean' ideas in the milieu of the *prédication* of early Islam.¹¹¹

This cursory review of John of Damascus' major polemical works clearly shows their relevance to the issues that divided the Christian communities in the caliphate in the first half of the second/eighth century. Indeed, it is clear that these issues were his major concerns. All John's works should be considered primarily in reference to the intellectual agenda of the 'Melkites' in Jerusalem and the east, and only secondarily in reference to the ecclesiastical problems of Byzantium, where his works came to be prized only long after his lifetime. In the patriarchate of Jerusalem John's works may be considered to be the primary, if not the definitive statement of the 'Melkite' theological identity in the formative period, the first half of the second/eighth century, even though it may also be true that he represented only one point of view, albeit the ultimately victorious one, in the matter of the veneration of the holy icons.

As for John of Damascus and the Muslims, while he did not write any independent tract *Contra Ishmaelitas*, and he paid scant attention to Muslims in any overt sense in most of his works, it can be argued that nevertheless the Islamic presence and Umayyad rule in fact conditioned everything he wrote. It was Islamic government that set the conditions within which the Christian denominations related to one another in the way in which they did in fact relate in the second/eighth century, and it was this situation which brought about the emergence of the distinctive denomination of the 'Melkites'. Cyril Mango has described the situation as follows:

The Orthodox were reduced to a footing of equal impotence with their old adversaries. They had to win the favour of their Muslim masters, define their identity and guard against apostasy. Criticism of Islam was unthinkable (hence no anti-Moslem polemic); controversy with Jacobites and Jews was both possible and necessary. Controversy was a stimulus to learning: it called for knowledge of the Bible, of patristics, of logical argument.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ See S. H. Griffith, "Free Will in Christian *Kalām*: the Doctrine of Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Parole de l'Orient* 14, 1987, pp. 79–107.

¹¹¹ On 'Manichaeism' and early Islam see M. Gil, "The Creed of Abū 'Amir", *Israel Oriental Studies* 12, 1992, pp. 9–47.

¹¹² Mango, "Greek Culture in Palestine", p. 159.

Certain intellectual and theological issues were 'in the air', so to speak, and were addressed by John because they were entertained not only by Christians but by Muslims as well. The issue of the freedom of the human act of willing, and God's foreknowledge of future free contingencies is a prime example. Finally, certain of the social policies of the Muslims, such as the aniconic and Islamicizing programme of the Umayyad caliphs, evoked reactions in the Christian community, like iconophobia among some, which was exacerbated by the news of iconoclasm in Byzantium, and which eventually called forth not only John of Damascus' Greek *Oration against the Calumniators of the Icons*, but Theodore Abū Qurra's Arabic tract in defence of icon veneration as well. In a certain sense all of John of Damascus' works, summary as they are, might be thought of in the ensemble as altogether putting forward the initial 'Melkite' response to the challenge of Islam. As with the other Christian writers in the world of Islam, in Greek, Syriac, and Arabic, the response to the new social and religious challenge was much broader than anything that could be encompassed in any number of expressly anti-Islamic, polemical pamphlets. It involved the heresiographical and Christological controversies themselves, which certain Muslim writers followed with great interest. And it is in this context too that we come to the discussion of the works of Abū Qurra and Abū Rā'iṭa.

Theodore Abū Qurra and the 'Melkites'

It is clear from even a cursory reading of the works of Theodore Abū Qurra that his theological agenda in Arabic mirrored that of John of Damascus in Greek.¹¹³ Like John, he wrote in defence of the practice of venerating the holy icons,¹¹⁴ he responded to the intellectual challenge of Islam,¹¹⁵ he defended the freedom of the will against the doctrines of the Muslims and the Manichees,¹¹⁶ and he promoted the

¹¹³ It is instructive in this connection to recall the title of the first scholarly essay on Abū Qurra's biography, Dick, "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abuqurra, évêque de Harran."

¹¹⁴ See Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah; a Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons (Eastern Texts in Translation 1)*, Louvain, 1997.

¹¹⁵ See S. H. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on discerning the true religion", in S. K. Samir and J. S. Nielsen eds, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258) (Studies in the History of Religions LXIII)*, Leiden and New York, 1994, pp. 1–43; also R. Glei and A. T. Khoury, *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra; Schriften zum Islam (CSIC, Series Graeca 3)*, Würzburg, 1995.

¹¹⁶ See Griffith, "Free Will in Christian Kalām".

dogmas of the 'six Councils', the touchstone of 'Melkite' orthodoxy.¹¹⁷ In the latter enterprise, again like John, his principal adversaries were the 'Nestorians' and the 'Jacobites'. But Abū Qurra dealt rather summarily with the 'Nestorians'. His longest discussions of Christology are devoted to discrediting the position of the 'Jacobites'.¹¹⁸ His harshest language is also reserved for them. They are his chief adversaries and the group which he suspects to be the most serious Christian source of doctrinal error about Christ. Certainly their Christology would have been the most vulnerable to Islamic, anti-Christian polemic in the third/ninth century. And this may well have been one reason why the 'Melkite' *versus* 'Jacobite' polemics in Arabic were so strong in this period.

Abū Qurra was intimately involved in the concern of the see of Jerusalem in the third/ninth century to commend the faith of the six Councils of Byzantine orthodoxy and the ideas of Maximus the Confessor among the 'Jacobites' in the territories of the other patriarchates, in Antioch and Alexandria, and among the Armenians. Michael the Syrian included in his universal history the memory of Abū Qurra's mission among the 'Jacobites' as it was preserved in the Syrian Orthodox community. He wrote,

In the year 1125 (i.e. 813–14 AD), a Chalcedonian of Edessa named Theodoricus and surnamed Pygla, who for a short time had been bishop of Ḥarrān and who had been deposed by their patriarch Theodoret because of charges brought against him, betook himself about the countries perverting the conscience of Chalcedonian and Orthodox persons. He propagated the doctrine of Maximus and even added to the impiety of that man. . . . He went to Alexandria, and because he was a sophist and entered into disputes by his arguments against the pagans (i.e., *ḥanpê*, the Muslims), as he knew the Saracen language, he aroused the admiration of the simple people. But since he did not succeed at Alexandria, he departed for Armenia. He arrived in the presence of the *patricios* Ashot,¹¹⁹ and from the first meeting he seduced him and rendered him favorable. . . . Then Patriarch Cyriacus sent Nonnus, the archdeacon of Nisibis, to unmask his heretical ideas so that he would not deceive the Armenians. . . . Nonnus delivered Ashot from both Dyophysitism and Julianism.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ See S. H. Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils, the Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Studia Patristica* 25, 1993, pp. 270–99.

¹¹⁸ See the discussion of these matters in S. H. Griffith, "The Controversial Theology of Theodore Abū Qurrah: a methodological, comparative study in Christian Arabic literature", PhD Thesis, The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC; Ann Arbor MI, UMI, 1978, pp. 172–221.

¹¹⁹ This must be the Bagratid Armenian prince Ashūt Msaker, who died in the year 826. See Dick, "Un continuateur arabe", p. 116.

¹²⁰ Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. III, pp. 32–34 (French), vol. IV, p. 496 (Syriac).

The essential elements of Michael the Syrian's account of Abū Qurra's sojourn in Armenia are confirmed in a letter that the 'Jacobite' controversialist Abū Rāʾīṭa wrote to the same Armenian *patricios* Ashūṭ, in which he said that he would send a deacon, a relative of his, to Armenia to engage in debate with Abū Qurra in defence of the Syrian Orthodox cause.¹²¹ The deacon was Nonnus of Nisibis,¹²² who did in fact go to Armenia, and according to reports preserved in Armenian sources, Nonnus was successful in countering Abū Qurra's influence¹²³ and remained at the prince's court for some years in the capacity of what we might now call scholar-in-residence.

Abū Qurra also wrote letter-treatises to the Armenians, in which he promoted the 'Melkite' creed. On the instructions of Patriarch Thomas of Jerusalem (807–21) one such text, written by Abū Qurra in Arabic, was translated into Greek by Michael Syncellus (c. 761–846) and was sent to 'those practising heresy in Armenia'.¹²⁴ In it Abū Qurra builds his case around the confession of Peter, 'the Coryphaeus of the Apostles', as he calls him, in Matthew 16.18. He defines terms, citing the authority of Gregory the Theologian, defends the Council of Chalcedon, whose teaching, he says, is that of Peter, and he argues that its theology echoes that of the 'holy Fathers', such as Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. In another text, which survives only in Arabic, Abū Qurra addresses himself to what he regards as specific abuses among the Armenians, such as the use of unleavened bread and unmixed wine in the Eucharist, and the ritual slaughter of animals.¹²⁵ These had all been very traditional topics of controversy between the Chalcedonians and the Armenians. What is noteworthy in the present context is that they still function as community dividers in the Islamic period, when the case is being made in Arabic.

From the first/seventh century onward there seems to have been an enclave of Chalcedonian Armenians in Jerusalem, engaged in theological activity and producing texts that had a considerable influence on

¹²¹ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rāʾīṭa*, vol. 130, pp. 65–6. Michael the Syrian says it was the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Cyriacus (793–817) who sent Nonnus. Both claims, being not incompatible, may well be true.

¹²² See A. van Roey, *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique, étude, texte et traduction* (*Bibliothèque du Muséon* 21), Louvain, 1948; S. H. Griffith, "The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis", *ARAM* 3, 1991, pp. 115–38.

¹²³ The event is reported in a passage in Vardan's universal history; see J. Muyldermans, *La domination arabe en Arménie: extrait de l'histoire universelle de Vardan*, Paris and Louvain, 1927, p. 115.

¹²⁴ *PG* 97, cols 1504–21.

¹²⁵ See J. C. Lamoreaux, "An Unedited Tract Against the Armenians by Theodore Abū Qurrah", *Le Muséon* 105, 1992, pp. 327–41.

ecclesiastical and political developments back in Armenia proper.¹²⁶ It must have been this connection that encouraged the special efforts of Patriarch Thomas and Theodore Abū Qurra at the beginning of the second decade of the third/ninth century to carry on a 'Melkite' apostolate among the Armenians. As always, Jerusalem and the holy places were the setting of these controversies because they were the pilgrimage goals of all the Christian communities, not least the Armenians, who had been flocking to the Holy Land since the Islamic conquest loosened the hold of the Byzantine government there.¹²⁷ In fact, Jerusalem was at least the literary setting for one of Abū Qurra's most interesting anti-'Jacobite' polemics, his 'Letter to a friend of his, who had been a "Jacobite"', who then became Orthodox on the occasion of his reply to him'.¹²⁸

The setting and the tenor of the composition can be readily seen in the long, opening paragraph, which we now quote in full.

You met us, brother David, man of virtue, in the Holy City, when we and you were brought together there, by God's arrangement, to perform prayers at the holy places in which our Lord Jesus Christ carried out incarnate the economy which he had prepared before the ages for our salvation. You asked us:

– how the holy Fathers liken the union and unity of Christ to the union and unity of man;

– how, since the Council of Chalcedon, it is not to be said that Christ has a single nature;

– how one can hear this statement, defined by the Council, 'Christ is two natures', and not then, from the thought of the two natures, arrive at two separate persons, each one of which is separate according to its own definition;

– how their saying Christ is two natures does not preclude for them the comparison of his union and unity with the union and unity of man, which is included in the speech of the holy Fathers?

You besought us to give you an explanation of this, a certain truth which accords with the opinion of logicians, and which can be confirmed by the most powerfully correct reasoning, to the point that it cannot be faulted by scholars when it is tested by them with the most unequivocally genuine examination.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ See S. P. Cowe, "An Armenian Job Fragment from Sinai and Its Implications", *Oriens Christianus* 76, 1972, pp. 123–57.

¹²⁷ See the introductory remarks of M. E. Stone, *The Armenian Inscriptions from the Sinai*, Cambridge, MA, 1982, pp. 30–6, 49–52.

¹²⁸ C. Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes de Theodore Aboucara, Évêque d'Haran*, Beyrouth, 1904, pp. 104–39; see the German translation in G. Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abū Qurra, Bischofs von Harārān*, Paderborn, 1910, pp. 239–77.

¹²⁹ Bacha, *Les œuvres arabes*, pp. 104–5.

It is impossible now to know who the David was to whom Abū Qurra addressed this letter-treatise. Georg Graf surmised that he was a bishop because at the end of the letter Abū Qurra invites him to 'convert immediately to the party of the truth, together with the virtuous flock'.¹³⁰ But it is not clear that this remark implies that David was bishop (*rāʿīn*) of the flock (*raʿyya*) to which the text refers. What seems more important is the setting, Jerusalem and the holy places, where both Abū Qurra and David are pilgrims. In the text, Abū Qurra assumes a tone of familiarity, addressing David throughout as 'friend' (*ḥabīb*) and 'brother' (*akh*), and expressing the hope that his 'text' (*kitāb*) will be without stridency and that it will not be disappointing.¹³¹ He takes up a question that was at the heart of the 'Melkite'/'Jacobite' controversies, namely, the comparison of the 'unity' of humanity and divinity in Christ to the 'unity' of body and 'soul' in man. Severus of Antioch, the principal theologian of the 'Jacobites', used it, and Abū Qurra refers to him several times by name in the text. And earlier Fathers of the church, such as Cyril of Alexandria, also used this significant but difficult comparison. So Abū Qurra goes to great pains in the letter-treatise to explain how the comparison is properly to be understood, without falling into the heresy of Eutyches, Julian and Apollinaris on the one hand, or that of Nestorius on the other. These latter names, for him, mark the heretical extremes which one must avoid; the names themselves are theological markers. As for himself, he says that his argument about the proper sense of the comparison in question is advanced according to the perspectives to be found 'in the scriptures of the Old [Testament] and the New [Testament], or in the speech of the holy Fathers, spoken in the Holy Spirit, so that one can recognize its meaning, even if some one of the heretics falsifies a statement spoken correctly'.¹³²

This latter point is an important one for Abū Qurra throughout the document, namely the need to understand a statement according to the 'correct perspective' (*alā jihat mustaqīma*), the way in which it was truly meant. He speaks again of this same need to understand a statement from the correct perspective, according to which it was meant, in connection with the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, which, as he puts it, is that 'Christ is two natures (*al-masīḥ ṭabīʿatān*)'.¹³³ He says,

¹³⁰ Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, p. 139; Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften*, p. 276, n. 2.

¹³¹ See Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, pp. 106, 114.

¹³² Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, p. 130.

¹³³ See, e.g., Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, pp. 105, 106, 120, 126, 130, 138. It is interesting to note that Abū Qurra does not speak here of Christ being 'in' two natures, the customary Chalcedonian usage.

For this reason, I beseech you, friend, not to understand the holy council of Chalcedon, nor the Tome (*ṣahīfa*) of St Leo, the virtuous Pope, except in this way, because everything said here is thought by the ignorant and the disgustingly unfair people to resemble the opinion of Nestorius. But it was not said by them in the way of the separation that is in Nestorius. Rather, they only said it to censure the obtuseness of Eutyches, and those of his opinion, who took it at variance with the correct perspective (*bi-ghayr al-jihāt al-mustaqīma*).¹³⁴

According to Abū Qurra, those who espouse the opinion of Eutyches are the ones who say that 'Christ is a single nature, composed of divinity and humanity (*al-maṣīḥ ṭabīʿa wāhida murakkaba min al-lāhūt wa-al-nāsūt*)'.¹³⁵ And this is a formula which, according to Abū Qurra, leads ultimately to the denial of what the Scriptures, the Fathers, and the Councils teach, especially Nicea and Chalcedon.

In all of this it is clear that the names of the heresiarchs, Eutyches and Nestorius, as well as those of the orthodox Fathers and Councils, play a rhetorical role that is integral to Abū Qurra's arguments. He wants to associate Severus with the heresiarch Eutyches, in the same way that his adversaries want to associate Pope Leo and the Council of Chalcedon with Nestorius. Contrariwise, he, and his adversaries too, want to claim the authority of the Council of Nicea, of Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria for their own positions.

It is a noteworthy feature of Abū Qurra's works always to list by name the heresiarchs whose doctrines he rejects. He does it in schematic fashion even in the 'Melkite' creed he composed, in which he calls Severus of Antioch, the chief 'Jacobite' theologian, 'Severus, the Scholastic (*ṣawwūs al-skhulastīq*)'.¹³⁶ Subsequently, other 'Melkite' writers followed Abū Qurra's practice in composing creeds in this fashion. There is an example of it in the Greek and Arabic *Life of Theodore of Edessa*,¹³⁷ as well as in a still unpublished 'Melkite' creed of the twelfth century.¹³⁸

This concern clearly to name the heresiarchs and to claim the authority of the 'orthodox Fathers' is evident in another important work of Theodore Abū Qurra in his controversy with the 'Jacobites' and others, his treatise *On the Confirmation of the Law of Moses, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy*.¹³⁹ It is in this work that Abū Qurra presents his theology

¹³⁴ Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, p. 136.

¹³⁵ See, e.g., Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, pp. 113, 121.

¹³⁶ I. Dick, "Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra", *Le Muséon* 72, 1959, p. 59.

¹³⁷ See Pomialovskii, *Zhitiie izhe vo sviatykh*, XLVII, p. 45; Sinai Arabic MS 538, f. 137v; Paris Arabic MS 147, f. 187.

¹³⁸ Sinai Arabic MS 453, f. 12v. See R. Haddad, *La trinité divine chez les théologiens arabes (750-1050)*, Paris, 1985, pp. 62-3.

¹³⁹ This text has been published several times: C. Bacha, "Treatise on the Truth

of the 'six Councils' of 'Melkite' orthodoxy, and in the process sheds some further light on the significance of the term 'Melkite' itself.¹⁴⁰

According to Abū Qurra, the institution of the Councils in the church for the discernment of the teaching of the Holy Spirit has its scriptural warrant in the account of the 'council of the apostles' in Acts 15, which, in his opinion, was foreshadowed in the council of elders appointed to assist Moses in Deuteronomy 1.9–18. What is more, he claims a special role for Peter among the apostles, and for his successor, the bishop of Rome, among the bishops of the world, all built on his interpretation of Luke 22.31–4. Accordingly, Abū Qurra further claims that when each of the 'six Councils' of the orthodox church was gathered, it was called, as he says, 'by order of the bishop of Rome (*bi-amr usquf rūmiya*)'.¹⁴¹ This rather surprising, and somewhat revisionist historical claim finds its explanation in the controversies in which the bishop of Ḥarrān was embroiled. On the one hand there were the Muslims, whose polemicists happily pointed out that the formulations of the Christian doctrines to which Muslims most strenuously objected were not to be found as such in the Gospel, but in the teachings of the Councils called by Roman emperors.¹⁴² On the other hand, there were Abū Qurra's Christian adversaries, the 'Nestorians', the 'Jacobites', and even the 'Maronites', who, according to Abū Qurra, voiced the same objection to the doctrines of the fifth and sixth Councils.

Abū Qurra admits that 'kings', in the persons of Byzantine emperors, had a role in the summoning of the Councils. But as he makes clear in the treatise *On Orthodoxy*, as we may call it for convenience, this was true not only for the fifth and sixth Councils but for all of them. In this connection he names Constantine I (324–37), Theodosius

of the Christian Religion [Arabic]", *Al-Machriq* 6, 1903, pp. 633–43, 693–702, 800–9; Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, pp. 140–79, with a French translation in C. Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes*; L. Cheikho ed., *Seize traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens*, Beirut, 1906, pp. 56–87; *idem*, *Vingt traités théologiques d'auteurs arabes chrétiens*, Beirut, 1920, pp. 75–107; in a German translation in Graf, *Die arabischen Schriften*, pp. 88–128; in an English translation in B. A. Nassif, "On the Confirmation of the Law of Moses, the Gospel and Orthodoxy", Master's thesis, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, MA, 1996.

¹⁴⁰ See the full discussion of Abū Qurra's conciliar theology, along with further bibliography, in Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils".

¹⁴¹ Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes*, pp. 23, 24, 25, 26. In another treatise, *On the Death of Christ*, Abū Qurra spoke of 'St Peter, who administered (*dabbara*) the six holy councils which were convened by the order of the bishop of Rome, the capital of the world'; Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, p. 70.

¹⁴² This is the dimension of the issue highlighted in Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils". It must now be supplemented by a discussion of the inner Christian dimension of the controversies, as Abū Qurra himself shows.

I (379–95), Theodosius II (408–50), Marcion (450–7), Justinian (527–65), and Constantine IV (668–85). And then he goes on to explain the emperor's role in the church:

It is necessary for the church to praise Christ, since he made the kings subject to her, that they might serve her fathers and her teachers, because every king in whose time one of these councils convened, was one of the most pious of all, since he supported it by hosting it and restrained the divisions in it so that the fathers might be enabled to investigate into the religion with protection and composure and to carry out its decision. As far as the king himself is concerned, it did not belong to him to investigate into the religious matter or to confirm the decision about anything. He was merely a servant to the fathers, listening to them obediently and accepting whatever they decided in the religious affair without participating with them in any of the investigation.¹⁴³

There could be no clearer apology for the 'Melkite' position than this one, as Abū Qurra articulated it expressly in reply to the 'Nestorians', the 'Jacobites' and the 'Maronites' who, he said, reproached the Councils that condemned them 'because Kings convened them'.¹⁴⁴ And these were the very groups who derisively applied the adjective 'Melkite' to Abū Qurra himself and to his church. Since, as we saw above, the earliest attested instances of the use of the term 'Melkite' are in the works of Abū Qurra's older and younger contemporaries, the 'Nestorian' Patriarch Timothy I, and the 'Jacobite' Abū Rā'īṭa, it follows that it gained its first currency at this time, in the context of the controversies between the Christian communities in the Islamic world in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries.

The occurrence of the 'Maronites' in Abū Qurra's list of adversaries has long been something of a puzzle to modern scholars, but in fact it enriches our awareness of the breadth of the controversial milieu in which he wrote. He names them not only here in the treatise *On Orthodoxy*,¹⁴⁵ but also in the *Letter to the Jacobite David*¹⁴⁶ and in the 'Melkite' creed he composed.¹⁴⁷ He accuses them of espousing the heresy modern scholars call 'Monothelism' and 'Monenergism', and

¹⁴³ Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁴ Bacha, *Un traité des oeuvres arabes*, pp. 28–9.

¹⁴⁵ See the passages examined in S. K. Samir, "Abū Qurra et les Maronites", pp. 29–31. In Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, the editor replaced the name 'Maronites' he found in the MS he was copying with the name 'Monothelites', always in parentheses, because, as he says, 'nous n'avons pas voulu blesser les sentiments de nos frères qui aiment faire catholique leurs ancêtres des siècles passés', p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, p. 124. See Samir, "Abū Qurra et les Maronites", p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ Dick, "Deux écrits inédits", p. 58.

of rejecting the fifth and sixth Councils 'because kings convened them, and for that reason they do not merit acceptance because the kings forced people to them.'¹⁴⁸

The fifth Council was called by Emperor Justinian (527–65) in Constantinople in 553 to condemn the so called 'Three Chapters' and to anathematize the heresy called 'Origenism'. It is not immediately clear why the 'Maronites' should have objected to the decisions of this Council. The 'Three Chapters' refer to the works and person of Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428); the writings of Theodoret of Cyrhus (c. 393–c. 460) against Cyril of Alexandria; and the letter of Ibas of Edessa (bp. 435–49, 451–7) to Mari. All of these persons and their works were suspected of 'Nestorian' sympathies. But their condemnation was part of Justinian's efforts to conciliate the 'Jacobites' in Syria and elsewhere by interpreting the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon from the perspective of the theology of Cyril of Alexandria. These new efforts have been dubbed 'Neo-Chalcedonianism' by modern scholars, a movement associated with the works of John the Grammarian and Leontius of Jerusalem, both of them sixth-century polemicists against the 'Nestorians' and the 'Monophysites'. They had connections with both Jerusalem and Constantinople.¹⁴⁹ The 'Maronites', and other Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians may well have resented Justinian's interference in matters of faith, along with his efforts, and those of the Greek-speaking intelligentsia, to re-interpret the teachings of Chalcedon.

The sixth Council was called by Emperor Constantine IV (668–85) in Constantinople in 680/681 to combat the imperially initiated heresy of Monotheletism, fostered by the Emperor Heraclius (610–41), and proclaimed in the *Ecthesis* of 638.¹⁵⁰ Although this new effort to conciliate the 'Jacobites' was imperially sponsored, the 'Maronites' accepted it, according to Abū Qurra, perhaps because it was supported by their own Patriarch Macarius of Antioch (d. 681), along with Cyrus of Alexandria (d. 644) and Sergius of Constantinople (d. 638). Abū Qurra names all three of them as the proponents of Monotheletism.¹⁵¹ It was

¹⁴⁸ Bacha, *Un traité arabe*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁹ See C. Moeller, "Le Chalcédonisme et le néochalcédonisme en Orient de 451 à la fin du VI^e siècle", in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht eds, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon*, vol. I, Würzburg, 1951, pp. 637–720; H. M. Diepen, *Les Trois Chapitres au concile de Chalcédoine: étude de la christologie de l'anatolie ancienne*, Oosterhout, 1953; P. T. R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451–553)* (*Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 20), Leiden, 1979.

¹⁵⁰ See F. Winkelmann, "Die Quellen zur Erforschung des monenergetisch-monotheletischen Streites", *Klio* 69, 1987, pp. 515–59.

¹⁵¹ Bacha, *Un traité arabe*, p. 26.

Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem (c. 560–638), and Maximus the Confessor (580–622), who may have been of Palestinian origin as his opponents claimed,¹⁵² along with the monastic establishment in Jerusalem and the Judean desert, who were the implacable foes of Monotheletism, and in this instance, ironically in view of the sequel, these stalwart ancestors of the 'Melkites' found themselves in strong opposition to the emperors in Constantinople.¹⁵³

In the campaign against Monotheletism, Sophronius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor turned to the Patriarch of Rome for support. Eventually, Maximus and Pope Martin I (d. 655) became the martyrs of orthodoxy in this struggle, and for this reason their memory would be cherished for generations to come among the 'Melkites'.¹⁵⁴ There is no doubt that Maximus' theology eventually carried the day in this controversy, including his ideas about the primacy of the Patriarch of Rome,¹⁵⁵ which Theodore Abū Qurra would borrow and develop in his treatise *On Orthodoxy*.¹⁵⁶ In the end it was Emperor Constantine IV who sponsored the Third Council of Constantinople in 680/681, the sixth of the 'six Councils' of 'Melkite' orthodoxy,¹⁵⁷ and he thereby became one of the 'kings' to whose role in defining the 'orthodox' faith the largely Syriac-speaking 'Nestorians', 'Jacobites' and 'Maronites' objected so strongly in Abū Qurra's day. Abū Qurra and his ecclesiastical colleagues were 'Melkites' in the eyes of the 'Nestorians', the 'Jacobites', and even the 'Maronites' because they accepted the faith as defined in all six of the Councils called by 'kings' in Constantinople.

¹⁵² See S. P. Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus the Confessor", pp. 299–346.

¹⁵³ On this Palestinian opposition to Constantinople over Monotheletism, see L. Perrone, *La Chiesa di Palestina e le Controversie Cristologiche*, Brescia, 1980; F. T. Noonan, "Political Thought in Greek Palestinian Hagiography (c. 526–c. 630)", PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago; Chicago, 1975; J. Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions", *Byzantion* 51, 1981, pp. 579–91.

¹⁵⁴ See their memory evoked in the Greek and Arabic *Life of Theodore of Edessa*, in Pomailovskii, *Žitije izhe vo sviatykh*, XXI, pp. 15–6; Sinai Arabic MS 538, f. 125r; Paris Arabic MS 147, ff. 169r–v.

¹⁵⁵ See J.-M. Garrigues, "Le sens de la primauté romaine chez saint Maxime le Confesseur", *Istina* 21, 1976, pp. 6–24.

¹⁵⁶ See Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils", pp. 290–3, 296–9.

¹⁵⁷ 'Melkites' continued to speak of the 'six Councils' of orthodoxy well into modern times. Among the 'Melkite' collections of canons in Arabic from the 13th to the 17th centuries, only 7 of the 21 MSS mention the seventh Council; see J. B. Darblade, *La collection canonique arabe des Melkites (XIII^e–XVII^e siècles)*, Harissa, 1946, pp. 154–5. Even Abū Qurra, who wrote a treatise in Arabic defending the practice of venerating the holy icons, never mentions the 7th ecumenical Council, Nicea II (787), in which icon veneration was promulgated; see Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah, A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons*.

Perhaps the 'Maronites' in Abū Qurra's day who rejected the sixth Council, as they had the fifth, because 'kings convened them', were motivated by the fact that the Council explicitly rejected a doctrine espoused by their own Patriarch Macarius of Antioch. They may well have resented this imperial interference in the profession of the faith, as they seem to have resented that of Justinian in the interpretation of the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon. For the 'Maronites' were one community among the Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians who, according to the testimony of Abū Qurra's younger contemporary, the 'Jacobite' Abū Rā'īṭa, were even willing to include Peter the Fuller's controversial addition to the *Trishagion* in their liturgies. He made a distinction between those whom he called 'Melkite, Maximianist Chalcedonians', and 'Melkite, Maronite Chalcedonians'.¹⁵⁸ What is more, in recent years a number of Syriac documents have come to the attention of scholars from which it is clear that the estrangement in the Syriac-speaking community of Chalcedonians over the issue of Monothelitism and the theology of Maximus the Confessor reached such a point that, after the first quarter of the second/eighth century, the 'Maronites' presumably established their own hierarchy. Thereafter, the group who would more often be called 'Melkites' became increasingly insistent about the orthodoxy of the 'six Councils'.¹⁵⁹

It was no doubt precisely to this group of Syriac-speaking Chalcedonians, both 'Maronite' and 'Melkite', as well as to the 'Jacobites' and the 'Nestorians', that Abū Qurra addressed the Syriac writings he mentions in passing in his short Arabic tract *On the Death of Christ*. In this work he strenuously defended the 'Melkite' orthodox point of view against the 'Nestorians' and the 'Jacobites'. Then, having spoken of the numerous testimonies, similes, and examples one might quote on behalf of the orthodox doctrine, he says,

Likewise, from the words of the holy fathers, we have ourselves adduced every sort of example, in thirty tracts (*maymaran*) which we composed in Syriac, in commendation of the view of Orthodoxy, and of the declaration (*qawl*) of the holy Mar Leo, the Bishop of Rome.¹⁶⁰

Unfortunately, none of these Syriac writings of Abū Qurra is known to have survived to modern times. But the very fact that he wrote them, along with the Arabic treatises that have survived, and the numerous Greek works attributed to him, testifies to the lively debate, in all

¹⁵⁸ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭa*, vol. 130, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ In addition to Brock, "An Early Syriac Life of Maximus", see also the articles by S. P. Brock cited in n. 19 above.

¹⁶⁰ Bacha, *Les oeuvres arabes*, pp. 60–1.

the languages of Syria in early Islamic times, that attended the birth of the 'Melkite' community as we know it in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries.

Habīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'īṭa and the 'Jacobites'

What Abū Qurra did for the 'Melkites' in third/ninth-century Syria/Palestine, Abū Rā'īṭa did for the 'Jacobites'. Within this ecclesial community his was the first Arabic voice which we can identify to address in the language of the newly dominant culture both the intellectual challenge of Islam, and the theological challenges of the 'Nestorians' and the 'Melkites'. While space will not allow an extended discussion of Abū Rā'īṭa's thought here, it will be helpful for our study of the development of the theological profile of the 'Melkites' in the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries briefly to survey what he had to say about them, and particularly about Abū Qurra.

Not much is known of the life of Abū Rā'īṭa. Only two datable events appear in the record. The first is the occasion when he was instrumental in sending Nonnus of Nisibis to debate with Abū Qurra at the court of Ashūṭ Msaker (806–25) in Armenia around the year 817, to which we have already referred, and which we know from his own works.¹⁶¹ Secondly, on the basis of a report contained in the chronicle of Michael the Syrian, we know that at a synod held in the year 828, Abū Rā'īṭa conspired with the same Nonnus of Nisibis to bring about the removal of a certain Philoxenus from the office of bishop of Nisibis.¹⁶² These notices are sufficient to ground the conclusion that he flourished in the first half of the third/ninth century. That he came from the city of Takrūt, the 'Jacobite' centre in Mesopotamia, is clear from the fact that in the manuscripts which transmit his work he is regularly called *at-Takrūtī*. It is not known for sure whether he was a bishop, a monk, or a learned layman, active in the service of his church, perhaps as a teacher (*malpōnō*).

There are eleven separate pieces in Georg Graf's edition of Abū Rā'īṭa's Arabic works, two of them very short excerpts of originally longer works. They have been preserved by the Coptic community, in the work of al-Mu'taman ibn al-'Assāl, and the *Book of the Confession of*

¹⁶¹ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, pp. 65–6.

¹⁶² Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. III, pp. 50, 65. See also J. M. Fiey, *Nisibe, métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours* (CSO 388), Louvain, 1977, p. 83.

the Fathers.¹⁶³ A third short piece, of immediate relevance to the concerns of the present inquiry, is preserved in at least three different manuscripts in three different places. It is the report of an occasion on which Abū Rāʾīṭa, a 'Jacobite', Abū Qurra, a 'Melkite', and a certain 'Nestorian' metropolitan named 'Abd 'Ishū, are brought together in the presence of an unnamed Muslim official. Each one is ordered to relate his distinctive doctrine in a concise statement, without any one of them making an objection to another one. Each one of them then states the classic Christological doctrine of his own confessional community, and offers a brief justification for their characteristic formulae.¹⁶⁴ Scholars have doubted the authenticity of this report. They point out that the only known 'Nestorian' metropolitan named 'Abd 'Ishū was the metropolitan of Nisibis who died in the year 1318. And they conclude that the report must therefore be a much later fabrication which simply makes use of the names of two earlier, well known controversialists. This conclusion, however, not only discounts two known persons in favour of an unknown one, but it ignores the fairly numerous known instances of Christians being called before Muslim government officials to give an account of themselves.¹⁶⁵ What is more, it also ignores the considerable interest on the part of Muslims in the denominational differences among the Christians.

Of the eight remaining texts, Graf reckoned that four of them were written to meet the religious challenge of Islam. He lists an epistle (*risāla*) on the Trinity;¹⁶⁶ an epistle on the Incarnation; a list of testimonies from the Old Testament in favour of both these doctrines; and an epistle substantiating the Christian religion.¹⁶⁷ The remaining four texts contain arguments against the 'Melkites'. They are the epistle addressed to the Armenian prince, Ashūṭ Msaker, which we have already mentioned, against the 'Melkite' conception of the union of divinity and humanity in Christ as this doctrine was taught by Abū

¹⁶³ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rāʾīṭah*, vol. 131, pp. xxv–xxvi.

¹⁶⁴ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rāʾīṭah*, vol. 130, pp. 163–5.

¹⁶⁵ See S. H. Griffith, "The Monk in the Emir's *Majlis*: reflections on a popular genre of Christian literary apologetics in Arabic in the early Islamic period", in H. Lazarus Yafeh *et al.* eds, *The Majlis, interreligious encounters in medieval Islam*, Wiesbaden, 1999, pp. 13–65.

¹⁶⁶ This text is the subject of a doctoral dissertation in progress at the Catholic University of America by S. Toennies Keating, under the title, "Dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the Early 9th Century: the example of Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Abū Rāʾīṭa at-Takrīt's Theology of the Trinity".

¹⁶⁷ On this latter text see S. H. Griffith, "Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Abū Rāʾīṭah, a Christian *mutakallim* of the First Abbasid Century", *Oriens Christianus* 64, 1980, pp. 161–201.

Qurra; an epistle addressed to the same Armenian prince in defence of the so-called 'Monophysite' addition to the *Trishagion*, and against the counter arguments of Abū Qurra; another short essay on the same subject; and finally a long epistle against the 'Melkites' which is in fact a treatise on the proper understanding of the technical terms 'person', 'nature', 'being', 'hypostasis', as these are used in Trinitarian and Christological thought.¹⁶⁸ It will be to the purpose of the present inquiry briefly to discuss the works against the 'Melkites', especially as they concern Theodore Abū Qurra.¹⁶⁹

As for the 'Melkites' themselves it is clear that Abū Rā'īta charges that their doctrine logically amounts to the teaching of Nestorius. In fact, he says explicitly in his *Refutation against the Melkites* that 'what induced them to this doctrine was a group of people who subscribed to the opinion of Nestorius.' And he went on to say that 'the Melkites' description [of Christ] as two 'beings' (*jawharayn*), two 'wills' (*mashī'atayn*), and two 'actions' (*fi'layn*), a single 'hypostasis' (*qunūman*), is thereby on their part an obfuscation of the mind for children and the inexperienced, for by the single hypostasis they mean what Nestorius meant by the single "person" (Ar. *barsūb* = Syr. *paršōpā*).¹⁷⁰ Abū Rā'īta's purpose to damn the "Melkites" by an association with the condemned heretic Nestorius is obvious. Otherwise, he said he meant to reprove them by "sound, lucid reasoning, and clear, genuine verses from God's scriptures, the Old [Testament] and the New [Testament], together with testimonies from the forefathers on which there was agreement, with which there was no difference".¹⁷¹ In other works, his apologetic programme was virtually the same in method as that of Theodore Abū Qurra.

From the perspective of the comparison with Abū Qurra, surely the most interesting work of Abū Rā'īta is the excerpt from his long letter to the Armenian *Patricios* Ashūt, in which he justifies the theological

¹⁶⁸ See Graf's *résumé* of the contents of all these works in Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'ītah*, vol. 131, pp. iv–xxvii.

¹⁶⁹ In addition to the ones mentioned above, only a few scholarly studies have been devoted to the works of Abū Rā'īta. They include the following publications: S. Daccache, "Polémique, logique et élaboration théologique chez Abū Rā'īta al-Takrītī", *Annales de Philosophie* (Université-Saint-Joseph, Beyrouth) 6, 1985, pp. 33–88; S. K. Samir, "Création et incarnation chez Abū Rā'īta: étude de vocabulaire", in *Mélanges en hommage au professeur et au penseur libanais Farid Jabre* (Publications de l'Université Libanaise, Section des Études Philosophiques et Sociales 20), Beirut, 1989, pp. 187–236; H. Suermann, "Der Begriff *Ṣifāh* bei Abū Rā'ītah", in Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics during the Abbasid Period (750–1258)*, pp. 157–71; *idem*, "Trinität in der islamisch-christlichen Kontroverse nach Abū Rā'īta", *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 74, 1990, pp. 219–29.

¹⁷⁰ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'ītah*, vol. 130, pp. 106, 107.

¹⁷¹ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'ītah*, vol. 130, p. 106.

exactitude of the so-called 'Monophysite' addition to the *Trishagion*. Earlier in the letter he had referred to the Armenian prince's proposal of a face-to-face debate (*muḥāwara*) between himself and Abū Qurra in Armenia. Abū Rā'īṭa declined this invitation, promising instead to send his 'close relative' the deacon Nonnus of Nisibis to conduct the debate with the learned (*al-ʿālim*) Abū Qurra.¹⁷² But he took the occasion of the letter to mention his own thoughts on the *Trishagion*, in the process recording some interesting information about the controversies in his own day.

In the course of his defence of the addition to the *Trishagion* of the phrase, 'who was crucified for us (*alladhī ṣuliba ʿamā*)', Abū Rā'īṭa mentions Abū Qurra by name some fourteen times. He calls him a 'wise' man (*al-ḥakīm*),¹⁷³ a 'philosopher' (*al-faylasūf*),¹⁷⁴ a man of 'outstanding intellect' (*al-jayyid al-dhihn*),¹⁷⁵ and a 'scholar' (*al-ʿālim*).¹⁷⁶ But, of course, for Abū Rā'īṭa he is also a heretic, and he says of him,

He is the 'innovator' (*al-mubdiʿ*), the 'fabricator' (*al-mutakhamiṣ*), the 'renegade' (*al-mutawallī*); that is to say, he is someone who opposes us, who contradicts the holy fathers in his expression and in his language, being hostile to them in every way.¹⁷⁷

Abū Rā'īṭa consistently speaks of 'Abū Qurra and his partisans (*ashyāʿahu*)',¹⁷⁸ meaning, no doubt, his fellow 'Melkites' and those who follow the teachings of Maximus the Confessor. At one point he calls Abū Qurra a "Melkite", a "Chalcedonian", and a "Maximianist".¹⁷⁹ And he distinguishes him from 'the others who remain with him, true to the filth of the innovating council, who are called 'Melkites', 'Chalcedonians', 'Maronites', turning their backs to the renegade Maximus, away from Abū Qurra and his party'.¹⁸⁰ Of these 'Maronites', Abū

¹⁷² See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, pp. 65–6. Nonnus' name was corrupted in the transmission of the Arabic text, and appears in the MSS as Elias; see vol. 131, p. 83, n. 1.

¹⁷³ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 73.

¹⁷⁴ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 73.

¹⁷⁵ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 75.

¹⁷⁶ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79.

¹⁷⁷ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 84. This interpretation of the text assumes the addition indicated in Graf's n. 6 on p. 84.

¹⁷⁸ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 75.

¹⁷⁹ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79.

¹⁸⁰ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79. My understanding of the last phrase of this passage differs from that of Graf, who translates: 'die den Maximus zu ihren Führer haben, der selbst wieder von Abū Qurra und dessen Anhang als Führer angenommen wird'; *ibid.*, vol. 131, p. 99. The difference turns on the understanding of the sense of the participles *mutawalliyyin* and *al-mutawallī*.

Rā'īṭa goes on to say that they belong to 'the religion (*dīn*) of Mārūn' and that they are well known in the villages and towns of Syria and Mesopotamia (*al-jazīra*). He says, 'We find them . . . saying the *Trishagion* and ending their prayers with the crucifixion of God.'¹⁸¹ He means they use the so-called 'Monophysite' ending.¹⁸²

As elsewhere, so in this context Abū Rā'īṭa is anxious to associate Abū Qurra and the 'Melkites' with Nestorius. He mentions that Abū Qurra uses trickery in his theological language so that people will not think he is a 'Nestorian', when he is willing to say of Christ crucified what Nestorius would never say.¹⁸³ But in the end, as far as Abū Rā'īṭa is concerned, the 'hallowing' (*al-taqdīs*) of Abū Qurra and his partisans, 'meaning Nestorius and the "dualists" (*al-muthannawīyya* = the Dyophysites) generally, the Jews, the first and the last adversaries, is a single "hallowing", no different from that of the Magians and the Manichaeans.'¹⁸⁴ Just previously he had said that if the Christians do not understand the matter as the 'Jacobites' do, there is then no difference between them and the Jews and the Muslims.¹⁸⁵ Finally, after citing a number of testimonies from the Fathers Gregory, Basil, Athanasius, John Chrysostom, Melito, and even Ephraem the Syrian, Abū Rā'īṭa exhorts the Armenian prince:

Test Abū Qurra's teaching,—may Christ lead him rightly and the others who oppose the truth and diverge from it,—and compare it to these testimonies with which the holy Fathers are in agreement, and similar things which you will find in the revealed books, which we have neglected to mention.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 79.

¹⁸² As Graf notes in *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 131, p. 99, n. 3, John of Damascus also refers to the 'Maronite' practice of 'adding the crucifixion to the *Trishagion*'; see John of Damascus, *Epistola de Hymno Trisagio*, in Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. IV, p. 313.

¹⁸³ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 73.

¹⁸⁴ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 76.

¹⁸⁵ See Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, p. 76. Abū Rā'īṭa here follows his practice of referring to the Muslims as *ahl at-taymān*, 'people of the south', presumably a reference to the *qibla* for the Muslims in Syria; see S. H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muḥammad, his Scripture and his Message, according to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century", in *La vie du Prophète Mahomet: Colloque de Strasbourg, 1980*, Strasbourg, 1983, pp. 126–7.

¹⁸⁶ Graf, *Die Schriften des Abū Rā'īṭah*, vol. 130, pp. 86–7.

The Heresiographical Milieu

It is clear from the foregoing that the 'Melkite' confessional identity was forged in the milieu of Christian inter-confessional controversy during the early years of the Islamic commonwealth. While it is true that the theological elements of the controversy came from the period before the rise of Islam, it is also true that the cultural and intellectual pressures of life in the Islamic world contributed no small share to the development of this distinctive Christian community, particularly as it defined itself over against its principal adversary, the 'Jacobite' community. And in this process a leading role must be assigned to the efforts in both the 'Melkite' and the 'Jacobite' churches, not only to translate their doctrines into the Arabic language, but in large measure newly to formulate them in this language, which was the common cultural coin, not so much of Christianity but of Islam. As a result of the successful inculturation of these Christian communities aborning into the Islamic commonwealth, a certain cultural estrangement developed between the Christians of the Greek- and Latin-speaking world, which, when added to the theological and ecclesiastical barriers already in place, gradually brought about an alienation between the Christians of the Orient and those of the West. A perfect symbol of it may be seen in the fact that in Crusader times, the Christians from the West scarcely recognized the 'Melkites' as Christians of the same faith; Jacques de Vitry (1170-1213), the Latin bishop of Acre, called them *Syri*.¹⁸⁷

While it is, therefore, true that Christian divisions in the East became more pronounced in the early Islamic period, as the communities defined themselves over against one another in the heresiographical milieu ever more clearly in Arabic, and at the same time estranged themselves culturally from their confreres in Byzantium and beyond, there nevertheless were Christian writers in the world of Islam who were more ecumenically minded. Under the religious and intellectual pressure of Islam, some thinkers pointed out that the three communities, the 'Melkites', the 'Jacobites' and the 'Nestorians', were in agreement on most things, and were separated only in the articulation of their Christologies. Some even maintained that they were one in faith, and different only in the theological formulae they used to express that faith.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ See the bishop's remarks about the *Syri* in J. de Vitry, *The History of Jerusalem: AD 1180*, trans. A. Steward, London, 1896, pp. 68-9.

¹⁸⁸ See, e.g., G. Troupeau, "Le livre de l'unanimité de la foi de 'Alī ibn Dāwūd al-Arfādī", *Melto* 5, 1969, pp. 197-219, reprinted in the author's *Études sur le christianisme arabe au Moyen Age*, Aldershot, 1995, no. XIII; S. K. Samir, "Un traité du Cheikh

Meanwhile, Muslim scholars observed and studied the divisions among the Christians, and some of them commented on them in detail. Most notably Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq,¹⁸⁹ the Muslim free-thinker who flourished in the middle of the third/ninth century, the very era in which Theodore Abū Qurra and Ḥabīb ibn Khidma Abū Rā'īṭa were so busy defining their own communities' differences with one another in an Arabic idiom, which was the principal agent of their mutual inculturation into the world of Islam. In later times, many other Muslim writers wrote about the divisions in the Christian communities, almost always from a polemical perspective. Their purpose was most often to show that in the light of Islam, Christianity made no religious sense in Arabic.¹⁹⁰

Abū 'Alī Naẓīf ibn Yumn sur l'accord des Chrétiens entre eux malgré leur désaccord dans l'expression", *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 51, 1990, pp. 329–43.

¹⁸⁹ See A. Abel, *Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad b. Ḥārūn al-Warrāq; le livre pour la réfutation des trois sectes Chrétiennes*, Bruxelles, 1949; see also D. Thomas, "Abū 'Īsā al-Warrāq and the History of Religions", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 41, 1996, pp. 275–90.

¹⁹⁰ See the convenient survey in A. Bouamama, *La littérature polémique musulmane contre le christianisme depuis ses origines jusqu'au XIII^e siècle*, Alger, 1988.

A CHRISTIAN READING OF THE QUR'AN: THE LEGEND OF SERGIUS-BAḤĪRĀ AND ITS USE OF QUR'AN AND SĪRA

Barbara Roggema

'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate'

Although it may form an appropriate opening of an article dealing with Islam, when it comes to the subject of this paper, the Legend of Baḥīrā, the *basmala* occurs within a fiercely anti-Muslim context. For according to this Christian legend, these were the very first words that the Christian monk Baḥīrā wrote for the illiterate Muḥammad.¹ This was the beginning of the long process of writing the Qur'an.

The theme of the Christian monk Baḥīrā's encounter with Muḥammad is well-known in both Muslim and Christian tradition. It is found in sources from as early as the second/eighth century. Different versions of the *Sīra al-nabawiyya* all tell the story of the monk recognising Muḥammad, when still a boy, as the final Prophet.² The monk sees a miraculous vision above Muḥammad's head and finds the 'Seal of Prophethood' between his shoulders, exactly as it is described in his book. The story is meant to show that Christians acknowledged Muḥammad's prophethood, and to prove the Muslim claim that Muḥammad was predicted in the Bible.

Christians in the Middle East had their own version of the story of this encounter, which they retold according to their own views and needs. For them, the story meant that Muḥammad did not receive his message from God, but from a monk who tried to convert the Arabs to the worship of One God. It was a reply to the claim that Muḥammad was a prophet and that the Qur'an was revealed, and it was meant to explain away the apologetic argument of the Prophet's illiteracy. In addition to isolated references to the story in several Syriac and Christian-Arabic sources, a group of texts has come down to us which relates at length the encounters of the monk with Muḥammad and which

¹ In the title of this paper I have given the name of the monk as it is found in some versions of the legend, but since the paper concentrates on a version which calls him only 'Baḥīrā' I will use this name here.

² See, for example, the account in Ibn Hishām's redaction of the oldest biography of the Prophet by Ibn Ishāq: Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat sayyidīnā Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 1859, vol. I/1, pp. 115–17.

forms 'the legend of Baḥīrā'. It probably originates in the third/ninth century, but it has undergone several redactions. The versions known are two Syriac ones and two Arabic ones, which have circulated in both Jacobite and Nestorian milieus.³ In this chapter we shall focus on the longer Arabic version, which distinguishes itself from the other three versions by, amongst other features, the large number of quotations from the Qur'an.⁴ In this text we find in total about 40 verses from the Qur'an,⁵ which Baḥīrā confesses to have written for Muḥammad. Whereas the Baḥīrā legend is an interesting and important chapter in the history of Christian polemic against Islam, it forms in itself a synopsis of this polemic, because many different Christian reactions to Islam culminate in it. In this paper we shall discuss the way in which the longer Arabic version deals with the Qur'an, how it quotes from its text and how it refers to parts of Muḥammad's life and polemicalizes against it.

We can distinguish several kinds of verses from the Qur'an in the legend. In the following we shall give a categorisation and discuss some examples to show which types of polemic are connected to them.

³ A hasty edition and translation of these versions was published by Gottheil in a series of articles: R. Gottheil, "A Christian Baḥīrā Legend", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vorderasiatische Archäologie* 13, 1898, pp. 189–242; 14, 1899, pp. 203–68; 15, 1900, pp. 56–102; 17, 1903, pp. 125–66. New editions and translations have been prepared by me, which will be published shortly. For a discussion of some aspects of the relation between these versions and the milieu of origin of the legend, see S. H. Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: reflections on a Syriac and Arabic text from early Abbasid times", *Oriens Christianus* 79, 1995, pp. 146–74. Apart from these versions we have a Latin Apocalypse of Baḥīrā (edition in the article by J. Bignami-Odier and G. Levi Della Vida, "Une version latine de l'Apocalypse syro-arabe de Serge-Baḥīrā", *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome* 1950, pp. 125–48). All versions of the Legend of Baḥīrā contain two long accounts of the apocalyptic vision about the rise of Islam and its downfall, which the monk Baḥīrā supposedly received on Mount Sinai before meeting Muḥammad. For a discussion of this apocalyptic material, see A. Abel, "L'Apocalypse de Baḥīrā et la notion islamique de Mahdī", in *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales* 3, 1935 (*Volume offert à Jean Capart*), pp. 1–12; and *idem*, "Changements politiques et littérature eschatologique dans le monde musulman", *Studia Islamica* 2, 1954, pp. 23–43.

⁴ In all other versions Baḥīrā dies in the middle of the story and his meetings with Muḥammad are recounted by another monk. In the longer Arabic version there is no mention of Baḥīrā's death. It is he himself who tells about the meeting with Muḥammad in the form of a long confession in which he relates how he wrote the Qur'an for him. Because of the defectiveness of the old edition, I will refer to the Paris manuscript, MS Paris Arabe 215, which is the *manuscript de base* for the forthcoming edition.

⁵ A precise number cannot be given. Some 'verses' are a combination of several Qur'anic phrases and some are not Qur'anic at all. Like the rest of the legend, the verses are written in 'Middle Arabic'.

'Pro-Christian Verses'

One type of verse that we can distinguish are those which refer positively to Christians, Christianity or the Bible. Several of these are well known from other Christian polemical writings against Islam. Some of them are explained briefly. For example, when Baḥīrā writes: 'If you are in doubt of that which we have sent down to thee, ask those to whom the book has been given before' (Q 10.94), he explains: 'By this I mean that the Holy Gospel is truer than all books, and cannot be impaired by those who want to discredit it, nor can it be changed or falsified.'⁶ Other positive verses are left to speak for themselves, for example the well-known verse in *Sūrat al-Mā'idā*: 'You will surely find those closest in friendship to those who believe those who say: We are Christians. That is because amongst them there are priests and monks and because they are not proud' (Q 5.82).⁷ This positive remark about Christians has not usually been interpreted by Muslim theologians as referring to Christians in general. It has been narrowed down to certain groups, mostly the Christians from Abyssinia who converted to Islam, some of the Christians from Najrān, or, ironically, Baḥīrā himself.⁸ The verse is presumably mentioned for a number of reasons, the most obvious being that such a positive notion can only originate from a Christian, and left without specification the implication is that it was meant in a general manner. It can furthermore be a plea for respect for Christians. But it also has to be read in connection with what follows, for the first quotation from the Qur'an that comes after it is what is in reality the first half of the same verse: 'You will find that the strongest in enmity against those who believe are the Jews and the polytheists.' Baḥīrā then comments: 'Then I saw that Muḥammad thought that the polytheists are the Christians but I explained that they are Quraysh.' The reason for quoting this verse thus appears to be that it occasions a Christian reaction to the Muslim interpretation of the word polytheist, *mushrik*. Because of their belief in the Trinity, Christians were commonly called *mushrikūn*. Here we see that the *mushrikūn* are a separate category: otherwise how could these two passages mention first positively the Christians and then negatively the *mushrikūn*? In order to remove all doubt about the meaning of the verse, Baḥīrā adds some very negative verses about the polytheists.⁹ The same procedure

⁶ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 162r.

⁷ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 161v.

⁸ For an elaborate discussion of the exegesis of this verse, see J. Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: an analysis of classical and modern exegesis*, New York, 1991, pp. 204–39.

⁹ They echo Q 9.5 but are not true Qur'anic verses.

of demonstrating on the basis of Qur'an passages that Christians are not polytheists is found, more elaborately, in Elias of Nisibis in his third *Majlis* with the vizier 'Abd al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Maghribī, held in 1026,¹⁰ and in the Letter of Paul of Antioch to his Muslim friends, which probably dates from the end of the sixth/twelfth century.¹¹

An intriguing passage deals with Q 43.81, a verse which I have not found in other anti-Muslim writings.¹² We read that Baḥīrā wrote: 'If the Merciful had a son, I would be the first of the worshippers', *in kāna li-al-Rahmān walad, fa-anā awwal al-'ābidīn*.¹³ He explains: 'And [Muḥammad] inferred that it meant "the first of the deniers".' And he adds: 'The worshippers are not the deniers and the deniers are not the worshippers.' On the basis of Muslim sources we can reconstruct what is being intended here. The verse presented a problem to Muslim exegetes, since it seemed a blasphemous suggestion; therefore some exegetes said that the word *in* must mean 'not' in this verse. Thus Abu 'Ubayda, for example, writes in his *Kitāb al-Majāz*: "'in" (if) is in place of "mā" (not), according to what some say: *mā kāna li-al-Rahmān walad fa-anā awwal al-'ābidīn*.' But he also gives the following interpretation: 'If, *in your words*, the Merciful had a son, I would be the first of the deniers (*'ābidīn*)', that is to say the ones who disbelieve and reject what you say. And this is taken from '*abida*'.¹⁴ So the word '*ābidīn*' would mean 'rejecters' if it is taken from the verb '*abida*' instead of '*abada*'. The latter exegesis is undoubtedly the one to which the Baḥīrā legend refers and reacts; anachronistically, Muḥammad is made to express a view which certain *mufasssirūn* had already suggested so that Baḥīrā can contest this particular interpretation. This explains Baḥīrā's addition, 'the worshippers are not the deniers and the deniers are not the worshippers', a sentence which is not Qur'anic, but which may have been made to echo the language of *Sūra* 109.

¹⁰ Louis Cheikho, "Majālis Iliyya muṭrān Naṣībīn", *Al-Mashriq* 20, 1922, pp. 117–22. See also S. K. Samir, "L'unicité absolue de Dieu: regards sur la pensée chrétienne arabe", *Lumière et Vie* 163, 1983, [pp. 35–48] pp. 38–9 (repr. in *Idem, Foi et culture en Irak au XI^e siècle: Elie de Nisibe et l'Islam*, Aldershot, 1996); and *Idem*, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien: Elie de Nisibe (Iliyya al-Nasibī) (975–1046)", *Islamochristiana* 3, 1977, [pp. 259–86] pp. 261–2 (repr. in *Idem, Foi et culture*).

¹¹ P. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche: évêque melkite de Sidon (XII^e s.)*. *Introduction, édition critique, traduction*, Beirut, 1965, pp. 66–7 (transl. pp. 174–5). See also the chapter by D. Thomas in the present volume, pp. 203–21.

¹² I place it in this category, although one could argue that as such it is not necessarily 'pro-Christian'.

¹³ MS Par. Ar. 215, ff. 161v–162r (in the Qur'an the verse starts with 'Say', *qul*).

¹⁴ Abu 'Ubayda, *Majāz al-Qur'an*, ed. M. F. Sazkin, Beirut, 1981, vol. II, pp. 206–7.

'Anti-Christian Verses'

As well as the positive verses about Christians, Baḥīrā includes a small number of verses which are reproaches to Christians or go against Christian views, some of which are familiar in anti-Christian polemic by Muslims. Quoting these verses, their anti-Christian implications can be refuted on the spot. We find, for example, the verse about the crucifixion of Christ, 4.157: 'They have not killed him and they have not crucified him, but it only appeared so to them.' Baḥīrā claims to have written this, and he adds: 'I meant by this that Christ did not die in the substance of his divine nature.'¹⁵

We also find the famous *Sūra* 112 (*al-Iklās*): 'Say, He is God, One, God, the everlasting, *al-ṣamad*, He begets not nor is he Begotten and not any one is equal to him'. Baḥīrā explains that he wrote this at the time when he had lost all hope, because Muḥammad's followers kept returning to their former idolatrous beliefs. He says: 'I likened God to the one they used to worship and I made him *ṣamad*, not hearing and not seeing; like a stone.'¹⁶ The word *ṣamad* should here be translated as 'massive', 'lifeless', which is the interpretation that Christians have traditionally given to this almost untranslatable word. It is one of the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God, and has many connotations. It refers to God's being impenetrable, indivisible, high in dignity, the one to whom one prays, the one who cannot be affected by those who want to harm him. This short *Sūra* was often used as an anti-trinitarian slogan, but the Baḥīrā legend diverts attention from its anti-Christian implication by interpreting it as God being 'massive', 'lifeless', linking the verse to idolatry. Particularly in Byzantine polemics against Islam, this interpretation was rife, and this aided the perpetuation of the image of Islam as a form of idolatry.¹⁷

'Neutral Verses'

In addition to these two types of verse which refer explicitly to Christianity, the Baḥīrā legend also contains verses which as such do not, or which were not used against Christians. As indicated above, the first words for Baḥīrā to write were the *basmala*. These are endowed

¹⁵ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 161r.

¹⁶ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 172v.

¹⁷ D. Sahas, "'Holosphynos?' A Byzantine Perception of 'The God of Muhammad'", in Y. Yazbeck Haddad and W. Z. Haddad eds, *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, Gainesville (etc.), 1995, pp. 109–25.

with a Christian meaning: *Allāh* refers to the Father, *al-Raḥmān* to the Son and *al-Raḥīm* to the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ The same happens with some other verses: the text attributes a Christian meaning to them, while in Muslim exegesis they are not interpreted as referring to Christians. An example which can also be found in other anti-Muslim writings is the beginning of *Sūrat al-Baqara*: 'ALM, that is the book in which there is no doubt' (Q 2.1f.).¹⁹ The words 'that is the book', *dhālika al-kitāb*, are interpreted as the Gospel. Some Muslim scholars recognised that the construction of this sentence necessarily meant that the reference is to another book than the Qur'an itself. For example, al-Ṭabarī, in his *tafsīr* of this verse, mentions that some exegetes believed that this referred to scriptures prior to the Qur'an.²⁰

Some of these verses do not come with any explanation by the monk, so it is not always immediately clear why they have been included. But by retracing the verses in other Muslim-Christian debates, the reason why they have been included can sometimes be reconstructed. Without any further comment Baḥīrā writes: 'God and the angels *yusallūna* 'alā the Prophet. O believers, bless him and greet him' (Q 33.56).²¹ The relevance of this verse in Muslim-Christian debate can be shown from a passage in the religious debate of Abraham of Tiberias with 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī.²² One of the Muslim participants in the debate asks: 'O monk, tell me, did Christ pray or not? Because the Gospel bears witness that he prayed to God and addressed himself to Him. But a God does not pray.' The monk says: 'It is true that God does not pray, but Christ prayed in the substance of his human nature to his Father.' Then the monk takes his turn to ask: 'Tell me to whom do the believers pray?' The Muslim says: 'To the Unique God, Lord of mankind.' 'And to whom do the angels pray?' 'Also to God,' he answers. 'And God, to whom does he pray?', the monk continues. The Muslim expresses his horror at hearing this question and says: 'God never prays—the prayers of the angels and the people are

¹⁸ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 160v. The same interpretation is found with the Ethiopian apologist 'Enbaqom in his treatise *Anqaša Amīn*; E. J. van Donzel, 'Enbaqom, *Anqaša Amīn* (La porte de la foi). *Apologie Éthiopienne du Christianisme contre l'Islam à partir du Coran*, Introduction, texte critique, traduction, Leiden, 1969, pp. 222–5.

¹⁹ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 175r.

²⁰ This issue is discussed by H. Berg in his article "Ṭabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'anic Term *al-Kitāb*", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, 1995, pp. 761–74, esp. pp. 767–8; see also p. 210 below.

²¹ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 167r.

²² G. B. Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820. Étude, édition critique et traduction annotée d'un texte théologique chrétien de la littérature arabe* (Textes et Études sur l'Orient Chrétien 3), Rome, 1986, pp. 470–83.

directed to him!' The monk then replies with this verse of *Sūra* 33. The Muslim protests that this is a different matter: the '*ṣalāt*' of God refers to his mercy and his forgiveness towards the prophets and apostles. The monk remarks that the Qur'anic verse is then strange, because no distinction is made between the prayer of God and the prayer of the angels. But he concedes this explanation and says: 'Like that are the prayers of Christ; they are his mercy to the ones who believe in him and follow him.' We see how the verse was used in a debate that was initiated by Muslims. Coming back to the Baḥīrā legend, it can be safely assumed that this verse is included as a reminder of this argument to the Christians.

Some 'neutral verses' are also to be found in the passages where it is described how Baḥīrā tries to establish a clear law to which the followers of Muḥammad can adhere. These deal with prayer, fasting and food laws, in which Baḥīrā identifies the Christian symbolism of his inventions. For example, the threefold aspects of prayer refer to the Trinity, and when he describes paradise to Muḥammad he explains that its four rivers refer to the four gospels.

The 'Counter-asbāb al-nuzūl'

Most of the different verses that are presented in the legend are listed without any context. However, with a subgroup of 'neutral verses' their writing has been placed in a specific setting, in which Muḥammad and Baḥīrā are debating about how to establish the religion, 'negotiating' about what to impose on the people. For example, when Baḥīrā proposes that Muḥammad should teach his people how to pray, Muḥammad says that his people will not be able to stand long and frequent prayers,²³ and Baḥīrā then reduces them. This could very well be a reference to the reduction of prayers that according to the Ḥadīth took place during Muḥammad's miraculous night journey, when he went up to the seventh heaven and met the former prophets on his way. When God commands Muḥammad to institutionalise fifty daily prayers, Moses warns Muḥammad that this is too heavy a duty for the believers and he advises him to ask God for a reduction in number, which is granted. Clearly, the legend attempts to create a kind of counter-context to this story. Baḥīrā takes God's place and the heavy load of fifty prayers is replaced by seven prayers per day, together with reading of the Psalms.²⁴

²³ MS Par. Ar. 215, ff. 163r, 164r.

²⁴ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 164r. I. Alon, "Bargaining with God", *Le Muséon* 110, 1997, [pp. 223–48] p. 240, has noted that in one Ḥadīth in al-Bayḥaqī's collection Muḥammad's

In the course of time, Baḥīrā's suggestions regularly conflict with either Muḥammad's wishes or with the habits of his people. It is on those occasions that what we could call the 'counter-*asbāb al-nuzūl*' appear. In this type of passage the *asbāb al-nuzūl* are changed into trivial circumstances, which are, however, close enough to the Muslim version of the events to make it recognisably a parody. We will discuss three more examples of this.

The Direction of Prayer

Again with the issue of prayer, Baḥīrā explains at what time Muḥammad's followers have to pray, and Muḥammad then asks: 'To which place do I command them to turn their faces, considering that they are praying around the House to idols?' Baḥīrā replies: 'Make them pray to the East where the sun rises, because from there all light and brightness radiates and every star moves and proceeds from there. And below it is the garden of Eden, Paradise, from below which the rivers flow.'²⁵ Muḥammad later returns to Baḥīrā saying that he ordered the people to bow and pray to the East but they protested and said: 'We will not obey you and leave the *qibla* which we and our fathers have been used to, to pray to another one.' Baḥīrā gives in and lets Muḥammad 'change the rules' under the pretence of a new revelation.

The Qur'an indicates that there was a change of *qibla* in Q 2.142–50, which was traditionally believed to have taken place in the second year of the Hijra. The Qur'an refers to a change of direction to the 'Holy Mosque' (Q 2.144, 149), which is interpreted as Mecca's sanctuary. Although there is no indication of what the previous direction of prayer was, Jerusalem is believed to have been the previous *qibla*. There is no unanimity on the question of whether this was temporary or permanent.²⁶ The Baḥīrā legend tells us that the change was from an eastward direction, the direction of prayer of the Syrian Christians, to Mecca. Although the main point of this passage seems to be Muḥammad's having to give in to the wishes of his people, there is more latent criticism. First of all, the fact that there was a change in religious

direct speech to God is described (whereas in other traditions his speaking is only implicit). Muḥammad says: 'Oh Lord, I fear that my *Umma* will not be capable of this.' In similar wording Muḥammad expresses this fear to Baḥīrā: MS Par. Ar. 215, ff. 163r, 164r.

²⁵ MS Par. Ar. 215, ff. 164r–v.

²⁶ For the problems related to this, cf. *EI*² art. "Kibla"; and R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (*Studies in late antiquity and early Islam* 13), Princeton, 1997, pp. 560–74.

stipulations makes it unlikely that these instructions come from God.²⁷ Secondly, the change was from 'Christianity' to 'Arabism'—pointing 'backwards' to the Christian origin of Islam.

The issue of the direction of prayer is raised in the majority of Muslim-Christian debates, in which Christians often had to answer for their own direction of prayer. In one of the earliest Muslim-Christian debates, the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bēt Hālē with an Arab Notable*, the monk is asked to explain why Christians face the East during prayer.²⁸ He explains that paradise is in the East, that Christ prayed to the East and that all churches have been built in the direction of the East. He adds some proofs from the Old Testament that the East was important. Further, in the famous debate between the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I and the caliph al-Mahdī, the caliph is more critical and Timothy is more defensive when this issue appears in the context of the question of how Christ abrogated the Old Law. The caliph asks whether it was not to Jerusalem that Christ himself prayed. Timothy replies by explaining how Christ himself abrogated the old direction of prayer, but he also goes out of his way to show that the East was the very first direction to which Adam prayed before being driven out of paradise.²⁹ The criticism implied in the caliph's question concerns the divergence from the true form of worship—a type of critique that is particularly dominant in the fourth/tenth-century Mu'tazilite theologian 'Abd al-Jabbār's discussion of Christianity.³⁰ As the Patriarch defends himself by referring to Adam, he seeks recourse to a more Muslim than Christian style of arguing. He claims to know and follow the 'pristine religion' (and is perhaps trying to outdo the Muslims in their claim to Abrahamic religion). We see how what we could call the 'polemic

²⁷ It would imply *bad'*, a change of mind on the part of God.

²⁸ MS Diyarbakir Syriac 95, ff. 14–15. The early dating of this debate is based on the assumption that a certain Maslama, mentioned in the text, is to be identified with Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik, governor of Iraq in the 720s. See S. H. Griffith, "Disputes with Muslims in Syriac Christian Texts: from Patriarch John (d. 648) to Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286)", *Religiongespräche im Mittelalter, proceedings of the 25th Wolfenbütteler Symposium (June 1989)*, ed. B. Lewis and F. Niewöhner, Wiesbaden, 1992, [pp. 251–73] pp. 259–60.

²⁹ A. Mingana ed., "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge, 1928, [pp. 1–162] p. 104, trans. pp. 29–30.

³⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār saw Christianity as a bundle of inventions from the time after Christ. He accused Christians of having left Christ's *qibla* for a Roman *qibla*; see 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Taḥbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān, Beirut, 1966, partial translation and discussion in S. M. Stern, "'Abd al-Jabbār's Account of How Christ's Religion Was Falsified by the Adoption of Roman Customs", *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 19, 1968, pp. 28–86; and S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity according to a New Source", *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Science and Humanities* 2, 1966, pp. 237–310.

of *bid'a'* took over a debate that arose in early times because of an easily recognisable difference between the two religions. Reading in the Baḥīrā legend how Muḥammad changed his *qibla* shows that this type of polemic worked both ways.

Miracles

Another passage which aims to show that the contents of Muslim scripture were determined by circumstances during the life of the Prophet is the one about miracles. Muḥammad comes to Baḥīrā and is at loss because his people say they will not believe that he is a prophet if he does not show them a miracle (an issue that is expressed clearly in Q 17.90 ff.: 'We will not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth from the earth for us', etc.). Baḥīrā promises to solve this problem and he writes: 'Nothing prevented us from sending the signs but that the ancients cried lies to them' (Q 17.59).³¹ Here we have to do with one of the sharpest points of criticism, launched by Christians against the Prophet of Islam time and again. Thaumaturgy was considered a prerequisite for prophethood, and Christian polemicists claimed that it can be known from the Qur'an that Muḥammad did not work miracles. Not only does the Qur'an not record any miracles as such, it was said, but it also states that Muḥammad did not work miracles and did not consider himself a miracle-worker. The Patriarch Timothy, in his debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī, raised this very issue, saying that all the words of God have been confirmed by signs and that abrogation can only occur by means of miraculous signs. He claims that if God had wished to abrogate the Gospel and introduce another Scripture in its place he would have done this by means of miracles.³² The Qur'anic verse in question is adduced in the *Kūṭāb al-Burhān* of the Nestorian apologist 'Ammār al-Baṣrī and in the *Apology of al-Kindī*, in which Muḥammad's miracles are ridiculed and explained away as apocryphal stories.³³ The thirteenth-century Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna gives a whole list of Qur'an verses which indicate that Muḥammad considered himself 'just a warner'.³⁴ Here in the Baḥīrā legend we must

³¹ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 173v.

³² Mingana, *Timothy's Apology*, p. 110, trans. pp. 36–7.

³³ 'Ammār al-Baṣrī, *Kūṭāb al-burhān*, in M. Hayek ed., *'Ammār al-Baṣrī, Apologie et controverses*, Beyrouth, 1977, pp. 31–2; *Risāla 'Abd Allāh b. Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī ilā 'Abd al-Masīḥ b. Ishāq al-Kindī yaḍ'ūhu bihā ilā al-Islām wa risālat 'Abd al-Masīḥ ilā al-Hāshimī yaruddu bihā 'alayhi wa yaḍ'ūhu ilā al-Naṣrāniyya*, ed. A. Tien, London, 1880, p. 58, trans. G. Tartar, *Dialogue Islamo-Chrétien sous le calife al-Ma'mūn (813–834), les épîtres d'Al-Hāshimī et d'Al-Kindī*, Paris, 1985, p. 159.

³⁴ Ibn Kammūna, *Sa'd b. Manṣūr b. Kammūna's Examination of the Inquiries into the Three*

assume that this verse was put in this context to indicate clearly that it indeed arose as nothing more than an excuse.

Muḥammad's Night Journey

An interesting rewriting of Muslim tradition underlies the passage about Muḥammad's night journey and ascension. Baḥīrā says:

I taught Muḥammad that he had been carried up to heaven and I informed him of all that I saw at the time when the angel took me up to heaven and I described everything to him, not leaving out a single thing, and I made him say to them: 'I have ridden al-Burāq to Bayt al-Maqdis.' And when Muḥammad told this to his companions they gave him the lie and said to him: 'We do not want you to describe heaven to us. Give us a description of Bayt al-Maqdis and what is in it!' And he said to them: 'Please let me ask my Lord.' And they allowed him. So he came to me filled with sadness and said: 'I have informed them about it but they did not accept a word of what I said. They have demanded a complete description of Bayt al-Maqdis.' And I said to him: 'Say to them: "I have asked my Lord and he has promised me that he will send it to me on the wing of Gabriel so that I can describe all of it for you."' And he did what I told him. And as a confirmation of what he had said I wrote for him the verse: 'Glory be to Him who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque, the precincts of which we have blessed' (Q 17.1). And I wrote for him: 'He was two bow's-lengths away or nearer.' (Q 53.9)³⁵

In Muslim tradition we find elaborate accounts of how Muḥammad went in one night from Mecca to Jerusalem on the steed al-Burāq and how he went up to heaven where he met the former prophets. The Qur'an gives little information about Muḥammad's night journey as such. The well-known verse, which is a starting point for the accounts that we find in *Sīra* and *Ḥadīth* literature, is 17.1. Other Qur'an passages which have been connected to this event are 53.1–18, 81.19–25, 17.60 and 94.1. These scant verses were woven into an elaborate story, but not all traditionists did this in the same manner.³⁶ Originally the

Faiths: a thirteenth-century essay in comparative religion, ed. M. Perlmann, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967, pp. 135–6, trans. M. Perlmann, *Ibn Kammūna's Examination of the Three Faiths: a thirteenth-century essay in the comparative study of religion*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, pp. 92–3.

³⁵ MS Par. Ar. 215, ff. 174r–v.

³⁶ Important studies which reconstruct the growth of the night journey traditions are: B. Schrieke, "Die Himmelsreise Muhammads", *Der Islam* 6, 1916, pp. 1–30; A. A. Bevan, "Mohammad's Ascension to Heaven", in K. Marti ed., *Studien zur Semitischen Philologie und Religionsgeschichte Julius Wellhausen zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag* (Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 27), Giessen, 1914, pp. 51–61; H. Busse, "Jerusalem

story of the *Mī'rāj* was regarded as a journey to Heaven where the 'Further Mosque', the Maṣjid al-Aqṣā, was to be found. It was Muḥammad's rite of initiation, part of which was the opening of his breast and the washing of his heart (cf. Q 94.1). This is how we find it in the History of al-Ṭabarī, who places it at the beginning of Muḥammad's prophetic career.³⁷

Then there was the interpretation that the Maṣjid al-Aqṣā was Jerusalem, the idea being that Muḥammad travelled there and back in one night. On arriving in Jerusalem he led a prayer and the other prophets prayed behind him. This journey was known as the *Isrā'*.

These events were combined: the ascension to heaven takes place from Jerusalem during the night journey from Mecca and all this was placed at a later date when Muḥammad had already received revelations. During that ascension he travels through the seven heavens, accompanied by Gabriel, he meets the former prophets there and he receives the command to institute the five daily prayers.

At the same time there were traditions which presupposed that it was all a vision—a journey of the spirit, not of the body. This is based on Q 17.60 where a vision is mentioned. A tradition on the authority of 'Ā'isha made clear that Muḥammad's body remained where it was during the events.³⁸

The differing opinions of those who believed in an actual journey and those who believed in a vision were combined in, for example, the account by Ibn Ṣa'd.³⁹ What he gives is: a journey to heaven (starting from the Meccan sanctuary at a place 'between the Maqām and Zamzam') and a separate account of the night journey to Jerusalem, which is followed by disbelief among the people. After this Muḥammad receives a vision of Jerusalem, which allows him to answer the questions of the people about it and to give a detailed description of it.

In the legend it is, of course, Baḥīrā who gives him these details. What makes the story a particularly easy target for a polemical retelling is first of all the fact that the story records the disbelief of the Muslims.

in the Story of Muḥammad's Night Journey", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 14, 1991, pp. 1–40.

³⁷ *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., Leiden, 1879–1901, vol. I, pp. 1157–9.

³⁸ See Ibn Hishām, *Ṣīrat sayyidinā*, vol. I/1, p. 265. Al-Ṭabarī gives numerous Ḥadīths in which it is claimed that this was only a journey of the spirit: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an tawāl al-Qur'ān*, Cairo, 1905–12, part 15, pp. 2–14 *passim*.

³⁹ Ibn Ṣa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, Beirut, 1960–8, vol. I, pp. 213–6. Schrieke, who drew attention to this procedure, remarked: 'Im arabischen Text ist die Naht der Zusammenflickung noch ganz gut wahrzunehmen' (Schrieke, "Die Himmelsreise", p. 19). This remark is equally valid for the account of Ibn Hishām.

It is not Muḥammad's opponents who distrust Muḥammad's claim of having travelled to Jerusalem and heaven in one night, but the believers. Abū Bakr believed it and was consequently called al-Ṣiddīq but it is stated explicitly that many apostatised at the time.⁴⁰ The fact that Muḥammad proved his claim afterwards by describing Jerusalem is also a key point: the proof of his claim supposedly comes from a much less miraculous version of the story, in which Muḥammad does not himself move. Although it is possible that this is the only form in which the redactor of the legend knew the story, it is more likely that this composite version was chosen specifically to make that point. As a reminder of the fact that all of this goes back to the tradition and not to the Qur'an, Baḥīrā only writes two very vague verses. Apart from 17.1 he also quotes verse 53.9: 'He was two bow's-lengths away or nearer.' Then Baḥīrā adds: 'And I made it such that nobody who would come after him from his community could understand this passage, because in fact he neither went up nor did he come down.' This writing of the verse Q 53.9 is another finger on the sore spot of the continuous discussions about the visions of Muḥammad. This verse, or rather verses 1–18 of *Sūra* 59, are overloaded with debate among the *mufasssīrūn*. The question is: Who forms the subject of verses 5–11? It was God, says the early tradition. But this was a problem for most of the theologians because it implies a corporeal God, and so the view that it had been Gabriel, became dominant.⁴¹ (The Qur'anic verses 81.19 and 23 may, in fact, be a rectification of the suggestion that it was God.) However, verse 53.9 was at the same time incorporated in the Night Journey traditions, where it meant that Muḥammad was at that distance from God. In *The Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* the phrase occurs twice and implies in both instances the distance between God and Muḥammad.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibn Ṣa'd describes the disbelief of the people who heard the Prophet relate the events. Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī explicitly mention that many Muslims apostatised: Ibn Ṣa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, vol. I, pp. 215–6; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, part 15, p. 5; Ibn Hishām, *Sirat sayyidinā*, vol. I/1, p. 264. The Latin translation of a Mozarabic polemical work against Islam, the *Liber Denudationis siue ostensionis aut patefaciens* (better known under the name *Contrarietas alfolica*), contains a chapter on the night journey (called 'the counterfeiting of the most improbable vision') which is very similar in wording to the passage in the legend. There it is said that after Muḥammad had related his vision 'sixty thousand men abandoned his religion'; T. E. Burman, *Religious Polemic and the Intellectual History of the Mozarabs, c. 1050–1200*, Leiden, 1994, pp. 374–85.

⁴¹ Both interpretations are found in the large number of different traditions recorded by al-Ṭabarī in his *Tafsīr*; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, part 27, pp. 24–9. For an analysis of this passage, see R. Bell, "Muḥammad's Visions", *The Moslem World* 24, 1924, pp. 145–54.

⁴² See, for example, in the Latin version: *Le Livre de l'Échelle de Mahomet: Liber Scale*

There are several explanations for the inclusion of verse 53.9 in the legend. One is simply that the redactor only knew it in relation to the night-journey association of the verse and wanted to show that there are no more than two vague verses in the Qur'an referring to the events. Also, the verse may have been picked on because it refers to a very important event but in a doubtful manner, the distance not being exactly specified. It is also possible that the redactor knew about the divergence in opinion about the subject of this sentence, and that he wanted to draw attention to it. That is perhaps the most likely explanation given the last remark: 'And I made it such that nobody who would come after him from his community could understand this passage.'

Discussion

The examples chosen in this chapter are meant to give a representative picture of the different 'readings of the Qur'an' within the longer Arabic version of the Baḥīrā legend. The cross section presented reveals a combination of polemical strategies. 'The Qur'an confirms Christian beliefs' is a clearly distinguishable tendency in the legend. The aim is firstly to make clear that the Qur'an can be shown to have originated in Christian circles instead of being revealed, and secondly that Christians should not be attacked by Muslims for their beliefs. This tendency forms a thread within Christian apologetic writings in Syriac and Arabic. It is already found in the *Dialogue of the Monk of Bēt Ḥālē with an Arab Notable*, in which the monk exhorts the Arab either to confess Christ as Son of God or to distance himself from the Qur'anic phrase 'Word of God and His Spirit'.⁴³

The legend highlights 'pro-Christian' verses, but at the same time tries to explain away verses which seem to contest that 'Christian origin'. Verses from the Qur'an which do not agree with Christian views are shown to be interpreted in the wrong way by Muḥammad and his people (read: Muslim theologians). In other polemical writings of Christians against Islam, including the other versions of the Baḥīrā legend, the verses which go against Christian views are explained as the influence of other men on Muḥammad after Baḥīrā's death, for example the Jew Ka'b al-Aḥbar, or as the result of the falsification of the

Machometi, ed. G. Besson/M. Brossard-Dandré, s.l., 1991, pp. 154–5, 236–7. See also R. Hyatte, *The Prophet of Islam in Old French: the Romance of Muhammad (1259) and the Book of Muhammad's Ladder (1264)* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 75), English translations, with an introduction, Leiden, 1997, pp. 126, 157.

⁴³ MS Diyarbakir Syriac 95, ff. 8–9.

Qur'an after Muḥammad's death. The Byzantine writer Bartholomew of Edessa, for example, writes: 'I have found that your Qur'an says the truth and tells lies. The truth stems from Baḥīrā's teaching to Muḥammad, the lies from the writing of 'Uthmān. From this we can deduce that your Scripture did not come from heaven, because at times it tells the truth and at times it tells lies.'⁴⁴ This notion is absent from our text: the legend divests the 'anti-Christian verses' of their standard explanation, Christianising the exegesis (although the monk does predict at the end of his confession that a lot of his teaching will be changed at a later date).⁴⁵

Apart from this, the legend tries to lay bare the contingency of the Islamic message by means of what I have called the 'counter-*asbāb al-nuzūl*'. The notion of Islam being a universal religion with divinely sanctioned laws is attacked by means of the tales of problems and changes at the earliest time of the religion coming into being. The genesis of Islam is described wholly in terms of 'down to earth' circumstances and compromises.

Even though most of the words of Baḥīrā are left to speak for themselves, below the surface the legend reflects knowledge of discord among the Muslim theologians on certain issues. The fact that the sensitive issues that are touched upon are not always explained may mean that the background of the debate about these verses was known among the Christians who were involved in debate with Muslims. It is likely that much of the knowledge of the Qur'an and its exegesis was the result of actual discussions with Muslims. Some verses of the Qur'an probably came up in Muslim-Christian debates regularly, and Christian debaters may have discovered that Muslim scholars did not always understand these verses in the same way. Their interpretation perhaps even changed through debates with Christians. For example, the opening passage of *Sūra* 53 was used by Abraham of Tiberias in his debate with 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāshimī. One of the Muslims in the debate asks: What would have happened with the world if Christ had died in Mary's womb? Abraham replies by asking the question: What would have happened to the world if God had fallen when 'He was at the highest horizon and came down'? (Q 53.7–8). The Muslim does not contest that the Qur'anic passage under discussion refers to God, and Abraham claims that therefore the Muslim cannot attack Christians

⁴⁴ Bartholomaios von Edessa, *Confutatio Agareni*, kommentierte griechisch-deutsche Textausgabe von K.-P. Todt (*Corpus Islamo-Christianum, Series Graeca* 2), Würzburg/Altenberge, 1988, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁵ MS Par. Ar. 215, f. 175r.

for having a conception of God as being limited and susceptible to accidents.⁴⁶ But once Christians had discovered this passage as a 'weapon' for debates with Muslims, they may have found out that other Muslims insisted this referred to Gabriel. This divergence in opinion then became a new 'weapon' which is used here. On the other hand, it is possible that works of *tafsīr* were read to discover discord about certain verses. For this it was not necessary to peruse and compare shelves full of Qur'an commentaries; for example with this passage of *Sūra* 53 al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* would have been sufficient for a Christian theologian to discover the problems related to it.

We cannot reconstruct the exact way in which Christians became acquainted with Muslim exegesis of the Qur'an. But what, nevertheless, seems clear is that verses quoted in the legend had become 'tags' of debate, in the sense that, by simply mentioning the verses the legend was able to evoke among the Christian audience discussions linked to them. Logically, they would have come with more elaborate explanations had the backgrounds of these verses not been common knowledge. In this respect they resemble the chapters of Dionysius bar Ṣalībī against the Muslims, which are found at the end of his larger work against heresies.⁴⁷ The last six *memre* of the thirty in this work consist of quotations from the Qur'an in Syriac (and they have a remarkable number in common with the Baḥīrā legend) without any comment at all. Again, the fact that the long list of quotations from the Qur'an in this work comes without any explanation, suggests that Christians had these verses handy as ready-made replies to challenges to their faith. Some of the verses were apparently picked because they were problematic for Muslims, in the sense that they had no straightforward exegesis for them (e.g. the mysterious letters, excerpts of Q 53 and Q 5.64). A Christian could supply this in debate with a Muslim.

This brings us to what may be considered the overall tendency of the Baḥīrā legend. What connects the different detectable strands of polemic is the point that a Christian, here in the person of Baḥīrā, can be shown to have a true background knowledge of the rise of

⁴⁶ Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade*, pp. 462–9.

⁴⁷ An edition of these chapters is being prepared by Prof. J. Amar. For an introduction to the manuscripts and contents of this work see S. H. Griffith, "Dionysius bar Ṣalībī on the Muslims", *IV Symposium Syriacum 1984, Literary Genres in Syriac Literature (Groningen—Oosterhesselen 10–12 September)* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 229), ed. H. J. W. Drijvers, R. Lavenant, S. J. Molenberg, and G. J. Reinink, Rome, 1987, and *idem*, "Disputes with Muslims", pp. 268–9. For a facsimile of the relevant chapters in MS Mingana Syriac 89 and a survey of all Qur'an verses in them, see A. Mingana, "An Ancient Syriac Translation of the Kur'an Exhibiting New Verses and Variants", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9, 1925, pp. 188–235.

Islam, to the extent that he can explain what Muslims cannot.⁴⁸ Baḥīrā, as writer of the Qur'an and witness to and confessor of Muḥammad, is *mufasssīr* par excellence, and therefore he can, anachronistically, give the final verdict on the exegetical debate. His 'existence' was attested by Muslim sources, but we could say that his existence, and with that his authority, is also established within the legend itself. The text gradually 'proves' Baḥīrā's existence by showing the Christian essence of part of the Qur'an. Baḥīrā's authoritativeness also grows, and this in its turn can be used to interpret whatever does not seem to fit the Christian mind at first sight. The authoritativeness created within the legend has its function outside: it works as a justification for Christians to interpret the Qur'an in the first place.

That the exegesis of this Christian monk necessarily supersedes all Muslim exegesis is the clue to the legend. This is made clear once again at the very end of the monk's confession. In order to take away all doubt about who has the right and capacity to interpret the Qur'an, Baḥīrā says that he did not make a *tafsīr* with his book, and that nobody knows how to explain it except 'God and the well-versed in knowledge'. This is an echo of Q 3.7, in which it is said that the meaning of the ambiguous verses in the Qur'an, *āyāt mutashābihāt*, can only be known to God and those well-versed in knowledge, *al-rāsikhūn fī al-ʿilm*. There is no need to explain who is regarded here as *rāsikh fī al-ʿilm* and who is not.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ As said, some verses are invented by Baḥīrā to make a clear 'law' for Muḥammad's people. He gives the people food laws and tells them about good behaviour, and he instructs them in detail how to pray. The passages about prayer make up a very tedious part of the legend in which all the 'threefold' aspects of the Muslim prayer are pointed out. It seems very farfetched to relate the movements in the *ṣalāt* to the Trinity, but perhaps we should not think that this is meant to convince anybody that the Muslim prayers are essentially Christian. The point seems to be that a Christian can indicate why Muslims do what they do, whereas a Muslim could not (as opposed to Christians who justify their acts of worship by explaining their symbolism).

⁴⁹ I would like to thank Fred Leemhuis for his comments on this paper.

THE PROPHET MUḤAMMAD AS SEEN BY TIMOTHY I AND OTHER ARAB CHRISTIAN AUTHORS

Samir K. Samir

The second part of the title 'other Arab Christian authors' may appear to be over-ambitious, although this chapter will, in fact, only be concerned with six authors in addition to Timothy I. They have been chosen for the different attitudes which they represent towards the Prophet Muḥammad.¹

The Seven Authors

We shall make a very short presentation of the seven authors in chronological order, leaving Timothy for the end because, although by date he should come second, he is the most interesting:²

1. Theodore Bar Kōnī from the beginning of the second/eighth century—we shall only touch on him briefly because he wrote in Syriac rather than Arabic;
2. Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī, a Melkite,³
3. and 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, a Nestorian, both from the period of the caliph al-Ma'mūn in the early third/ninth century;
4. the author of the *Kūtāb al-burhān* from the end of the third/ninth century, maybe around 267/880. In the manuscripts the work is often attributed to St Athanasius, and likewise in the earlier edition published in Egypt in 1928. Graf suggested that the author was Eutychius, *alias* Sa'īd Ibn al-Baṭrīq, and the editors of the most recent edition in the *CSCO* series published it under his name. However, in the oldest manuscript (*Sinai Arabic* 75) and in

¹ I am much in debt to my colleagues Dr David Thomas and Fr Joseph Buhagiar-Bianco for their help in correcting the English text.

² He is also the best known, though often misinterpreted. The work in which he expresses views on Muḥammad is most complicated to use because we have three versions, one in Syriac and two in Arabic. I have prepared my own critical edition of the Arabic texts before starting this research, and compared the three texts in a synopsis.

³ G. B. Maruzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāshimī à Jérusalem vers 820 (Textes et Études sur l'Orient Chrétien 3)*, Rome, 1986.

the title of an old manuscript (*Sinai Arabic 441*), the work is clearly attributed to Buṭrus al-Bayt Raʿsī;⁴

5. ʿAmr b. Mattā, a Nestorian who probably flourished at the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century⁵ (although Graf⁶ locates him in the eighth/fourteenth century), and the author of the *Kitāb al-mijdal*, the first Arab Christian encyclopaedia, in seven parts
6. Ibn al-ʿIbrī, the great Syrian author (d. 685/1286), who may have written his Arabic history between 659/1260 and 669/1270, towards the end of his life;
7. Lastly, Timothy I (d. 208/823), the Nestorian patriarch, who debated with the caliph al-Mahdī in the year 165/781.

1. *A Syriac Author: Theodore Bar Kōnī*

Referring briefly to Theodore Bar Kōnī, he makes two allusions to Muḥammad.⁷

One comes in a dialogue with a follower of Muḥammad concerning baptism, where he professes his conviction that Muḥammad could not have delivered messages from God. He asks:

Did Muḥammad, the one who handed his teaching over to you, get it from God or from his own conscience, that he should speak in this way [against baptism]? If it is from his own mind, we shall not abandon the teaching of the scriptures, to follow him and his ideas. And if you say it is from God, then where has this God who has taught this been, to be misunderstood for more than six hundred years after Christ appeared?⁸

Here Theodore means that Christ delivered authentic teaching from God, so if what Muḥammad proclaimed is also authentic the earlier revelation to the Christians must have disappeared and only reappeared six hundred years later. Since such an idea is implausible, what Muḥammad says about baptism must be wrong, with the consequence that the message of Muḥammad could not have been from God.

⁴ See S. K. Samir, "La littérature melkite sous les premiers abbassides", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 56, 1990, pp. 469–86, esp. pp. 483–5.

⁵ See B. Holmberg, "A reconsideration of the *Kitāb al-mijdal*", in S. K. Samir, *Actes du 4^e congrès international d'études arabes chrétiennes (Cambridge, septembre 1992)*, *Parole de l'Orient* 18, 1993, pp. 255–73.

⁶ Cf. G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. II (*Studi e Testi*, 133), Vatican, 1947, pp. 216–18.

⁷ See S. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the *Scholion*: Theodore Bar Kōnī's apology for Christianity", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47, 1981, pp. 158–88, esp. pp. 182–3.

⁸ A. Scher, *Theodorus Bar Kōnī, Liber Scholiorum (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 55)*, Paris, 1910, p. 246.

Theodore's other allusion occurs at the end of the same dialogue: 'If all that you have said is true, why at a certain time did a teacher arise from among yourselves and denounce it all?'⁹ This 'teacher' is Baḥīrā, who in the Muslim tradition is said to have recognised Muḥammad's prophethood, though in the Christian tradition he is said to have given Muḥammad misleading teachings.¹⁰

These are the two allusions to Muḥammad in Theodore Bar Kōnī.

2. Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī

Now we move to the Arabic authors. Leaving Timothy to one side for the moment, the first are Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī and 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, who were contemporaries.

Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī was most probably writing in the period of the caliph al-Ma'mūn in the early third/ninth century, as we can deduce from his own work.¹¹

1. Muḥammad is not a Prophet

On the question whether Muḥammad was a prophet, he provides an answer in a number of steps, beginning with a flat denial: *Wa ammā qawluka fī nabīyyika innahu khātam al-anbiyā'*¹² *fā-laysa huwa nabīyyan abqāka Allāh* ('As for your statement concerning your prophet that he was "the Seal of the Prophets", he was not a prophet (May God prolong your life!').¹³ Ibrāhīm's answer here is very clear: not only is Muḥamad not the Seal of the Prophets, but he is not a prophet at all (*laysa huwa nabīyyan*).

He repeats this when he is asked by his opponent: *Arāka tuḡādilunī bi-Qur'ānī. A-fa-tuqirru anna hādhā al-Qur'ān waḥyun min Allāhi, anzalahu 'alā nabīyyihi Muḥammad? Qāla al-rāhib: lā la-ʿamrī! Mā uqirru shay'an min hādhā, wa-lā uqirru anna nabīyyaka nabīyyun* ('I see that you argue with me from my Qur'an. Will you agree that this Qur'an is a revelation from God, which he sent down on his Prophet Muḥammad?' The monk said: 'No, by my life! I do not agree to any of this, nor that your prophet was a prophet').¹⁴

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁰ See *EP*², vol. I, pp. 922–3, art. "Baḥīra"; R. Gottheil, "A Christian Bahira Legend", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 13, 1898, pp. 189–242; 14, 1899, pp. 203–68; 15, 1900, pp. 56–102; 17, 1903, pp. 125–66.

¹¹ See Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 124–5, pp. 328–9.

¹² See Q 33.40, although it says *khātam al-nabīyyīn* rather than *khātam al-anbiyā'*.

¹³ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, no. 110, p. 321.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, nos 466–7, p. 485.

2. 'He was Only a King whom God Favoured'

So what does Ibrāhīm think Muḥammad was? The answer is given in both passages, immediately after this negative answer, in the same positive way: *Wa-innāmā huwa malikun irtadāhu Allāh*,¹⁵ or *Mā huwa illā malikun irtadāhu Allāh*¹⁶ ('He was only a king whom God favoured').

Therefore, for Ibrāhīm Muḥammad was only (*innāmā huwa, mā huwa illā*) a king. But, in fact, he was more than simply a political leader, he was one who had approval or favour from God.

The same idea is expressed elsewhere in Ibrāhīm's works. When our monk asks a Jew whether he has found in his Scriptures something announcing the prophethood of Muḥammad, the Jew answers: *Lā wa-Allāhi! Mā lahu dhikrūn fī shay'in min al-kutubi, wa-lā li-aḥādīn min zar'ihī, wa-lā wahaba Allāhu lahu ghayra al-mulki wa-al-sultān*¹⁷ ('No, by God, there is no mention of him in any of the Scriptures, and no mention of anyone from his offspring. God did not grant him anything but kingdom and power').

So we could suppose that there was a special relation between God and Muḥammad, given that God granted him kingdom. But in fact, in medieval theology this is not so, for God effects everything that occurs on earth. He grants victory and power, and it does not mean that the one who is granted victory is close to God. We see this from the fact that among powerful kings were unbelievers and pagans: *Wa-ammā qawluḥa fī amīri al-mu'minīn: Inna Allāha qad a'azzahu*¹⁸ . . . *fa-qad a'azza man kāna qablahu min al-kuffāri wa-al-mushrikīn. Fa-unzur ilā mulūki*¹⁹ *al-a'ājimi, wa-ilā kufrihim bi-Allāh! Wa-inna Allāha . . . yahfazuhum, wa-huwa mudabbirū khalqihī kayfa aḥabba!*²⁰

3. God Fulfilled his Promise concerning Ishmael through Muḥammad

Our author goes further. This sentence is followed closely by the third step, in which Ibrāhīm says: *Awfa bi-hi wa-'alā yadihi wa'dahu li-Ibrāhīma fī Ismā'īl*²¹ ('He [God] accomplished by him and through him his promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael'); or *wa-tamma bi-hi wa'du Ibrāhīma fī Ismā'īl*²² ('By him was fulfilled the promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael'). This is a reference to Genesis 21.12–13: 'But God said to

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 110, p. 321.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 468, p. 485.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 162, p. 347.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 52, pp. 291–3; *ummati al-mu'minīn* must be corrected to *amīri al-mu'minīn*.

¹⁹ I have corrected *maliki* (translated as 'le roi des Perses') to *mulūki*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 110, p. 321.

²¹ *Ibid.*, nos 122–3, p. 329.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 468, p. 485.

Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy Ishmael and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you. As for the son of the slave woman, Ishmael, I will make a nation of him also because he is your offspring."²³

So Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī is acknowledging that God fulfilled his promise through Muḥammad. This can be interpreted in a very positive way: Muḥammad is part of God's plan of salvation.

4. The Qur'an was Compiled by Many Persons

In the fourth step of his answer he refers to the relationship between Muḥammad and the Qur'an.

When asked about the Qur'an, he answers:

*Wa-ammā qawlaka fī al-Qur'ān, fa-innī ukhbiruka anna hādihā al-Qur'āna jā'a bi-hi Muḥammadun wa-katabahu aṣḥābuhu ba'da mawtihi; wa-asmā'u ba'dihim Abū Bakr wa-'Umar wa-'Uthmān wa-'Alī wa-'Abdullāh b. al-'Abbās wa-Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān kātib [or kataba/kuttāb?] al-wahy. Wa-al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf ba'da hā'ulā'i allafahu wa-rattabahu*²⁴ ('As for what you say about the Qur'an, I can tell you that Muḥammad brought the Qur'an, and his Companions wrote it down after his death; the names of some of them are Abū Bakr,²⁴ 'Umar,²⁵ 'Uthmān,²⁶ 'Alī,²⁷ 'Abdullāh b. al-'Abbās²⁸ and Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān,²⁹ the scribes of the revelation, and after these al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf³⁰ compiled it and arranged it').

He is therefore saying that Muḥammad was the author of the Qur'an, and thereby denying that it came from God. But this also means that the Qur'an was not from Satan, as some Latin or Byzantine authors affirmed.

²³ *Ibid.*, no. 126, p. 331.

²⁴ Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), the first Caliph and Muḥammad's father-in-law, is regarded as the first who tried to compile the Qur'an with the help of Zayd b. Thābit.

²⁵ 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 24/644), the second Caliph, completed the first redaction of the Qur'an initiated by Abū Bakr.

²⁶ 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (d. 36/656), the third Caliph and Muḥammad's son-in-law, is the one who had the Qur'an made into a book (*muṣḥaf*).

²⁷ 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 41/661), the fourth Caliph and Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law, was the author of a redaction of the Qur'an very different from the official one, according to the Shī'ī historian Aḥmad al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/897).

²⁸ 'Abdallāh b. al-'Abbās (d. 68/687), often called Ibn 'Abbās, Muḥammad's cousin, is the most famous Qur'anic exegete; see *EP*², vol. I, pp. 41-2, art. "'Abd Allāh b. al-'Abbās'".

²⁹ Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680), the first Umayyad Caliph.

³⁰ Al-Hajjāj b. Yūsuf (d. 95/714) is the famous general and governor. It was he who revised and imposed the *muṣḥaf* of 'Uthmān, adding the dots and other punctuation signs.

5. Muḥammad and Jesus

He goes on:

*Fa-lamma zahara [ʿĪsā] wa-aḏhara al-ayāt, wa-tammama kutuba al-anbiyāʾ wa-ḥaqqaga qawlahum, kafartum antum bi-hi wa-lam tardū ḥattā taqāwamū jamīʿa al-muʾminīna bi-hi wa-taʿamūna anna Muḥammadan aʿazzu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi minhu*³¹ ('When Jesus appeared and performed miracles, and completed the books of the prophets and fulfilled their words, you did not believe in him and you did not accept him even though all believers acknowledge him; you claim that Muḥammad is greater than him and more noble in the sight of God').

The author means that Jesus must be truly from God because he fulfilled the Old Testament prophets; it is difficult to see why Muslims refuse to accept him.

Ibrāhīm's next answer recalls Timothy's:

*Qāla lahu al-amīr: Wayḥaka ya rāhib! a-wa-mā taʿlamu anna Muḥammadan aʿazza wa-akrama ʿinda Allāhi min al-Masīḥi wa-min Ādama wa-dhurriyatihi kullihā.*³² ('The Amir said to him: "Now then, monk, do you not know that Muḥammad is greater and more noble before God than the Messiah, Adam and all his descendants?"').

He gives the expected answer: *Lā wa-Allāhi mā aʿlamu dhālika* ('By God, I do not know this').

But in his explanation as to why Christ is superior we find something which we also find in Timothy. Ibrāhīm says,

*Wa-lākinni aʿlamu anna al-samāʾa ashrafu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi min al-arḍi wa-sukkān al-samāʾi ashrafu wa-akramu ʿinda Allāhi min sukkān al-arḍ.*³³ *Wa-aʿlamu anna al-Masīḥi fī al-samāʾi al-ʿulyā.*³⁴ ('But I do know that heaven is more honoured and noble before God than the earth, and that those dwelling in heaven are more honoured and noble before God than those dwelling on earth. And I know that the Messiah is in the highest heaven').

This is a clear allusion to the Qur'an: *Innī mutawaffika wa rāfiʿuka ilayya.*³⁵

The passage continues:

*Wa-[anna] Muḥammadan wa jamīʿa al-anbiyāʾ taḥta al-tharā wa-anna al-samāʾa kursiyu Allāhi wa-arshuhu wa-anna al-Masīḥi jālisun ʿalā kursiyi al-ʿizzati ʿan yamīni al-ʾAbi fawqa al-malāʾika wa-al-ʿibād. Fa-kayfa yakūna man taḥta al-tharā akramu ʿinda Allāhi min man huwa fī al-samāʾi ʿalā kursiyi al-ʿizz.*³⁶ ('[And I

³¹ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 305f., p. 403.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 307, p. 405.

³³ In some manuscripts: *min al-ādamiyyīn*.

³⁴ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 308–9a, p. 405.

³⁵ Q 3.55.

³⁶ Marcuzzo, *Dialogue*, nos 309b–10, pp. 405–7.

know that] Muḥammad and all the prophets are beneath the earth, and heaven is the seat and throne of God,³⁷ and the Messiah is seated in majesty on the right hand of the Father,³⁸ above the angels and the believers. How can one who is beneath the earth³⁹ be more noble before God than one who is in heaven and seated in majesty?).

We will see below that for Timothy, as well, the reason why there could be no revelation after the gospel is that the gospel is *samāwī* and any other is *arḍī*.

3. *ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī*

1. Structure of his Apology

Now we turn to ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, who writes at great length about Muḥammad and is the most aggressive of these authors. This is presumably why he does not use his own name, but a pseudonym. He should, however, not be disregarded because of this attitude, for he gives much significant historical information. He also wrote under al-Maʿmūn, in about the year 210/825.

His long *Risāla* can be divided into four parts, which are unfortunately not clearly indicated in the editions: the first concerns *al-tawḥīd wa-al-tathlīth*, a short treatise on *De Deo uno et trino* which is almost copied from the Syrian Christian theologian Abū Rāʾiṭa Ḥabīb b. Hudhayl al-Takrītī. The second attacks the prophethood of Muḥammad, the third deals with the Qurʾan, and the last is a defence of Christianity. The attack on Islam, which corresponds with the second and third parts, is very rare in Arab Christian literature, and probably unique. It is entitled *Radd ʿalā al-Islām* rather than the more usual *jawāb*, maybe the only occurrence of this polemical term which is parallel to the Muslim *Radd ʿalā al-Naṣārā*.

2. The Prophethood of Muḥammad

On the question of the prophethood of Muḥammad, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ uses two series of arguments: the first is classical in Christian apologetics, while the second is rather new.

ʿAbd al-Masīḥ argues that Muḥammad cannot be a prophet for reasons that are well known in Christian tradition, namely that he was not announced by *prophecies*, and he did not perform any *miracle*. The

³⁷ Q 2.255 and 23.86.

³⁸ See Mk 16.19; Heb. 1.3; Ps. 109.1; Col. 3.1. See also the Nicene Creed (in Arabic): *wa-jalasa ʿan yamīni Allāhi al-ʾAbi*.

³⁹ He means Muḥammad.

only miracle attributed to him in the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. This kind of argument is well known in Christian apologetics.

What is new in 'Abd al-Masīḥ's attack on Muḥammad's prophet-hood is the following *historical* part. From a study of the life of Muḥammad, 'Abd al-Masīḥ asserts that he cannot have been chosen as a prophet for a number of reasons.

One is his *ghazawāt*, raids. 'Abd al-Masīḥ shows that Muḥammad was more of a warrior than a prophet. And even as a warrior he sometimes attacked people unfairly. No Arab of nobility would recognise such acts as carried out by an Arab of any worth. 'Abd al-Masīḥ refers to an occasion when Muḥammad ordered an old man to be killed, and also to his relations with the Jews.

Another reason is Muḥammad's sexual behaviour, his wives and concubines, about whom 'Abd al-Masīḥ enumerates a number of details, just as he does for the *ghazawāt*. Of course, the wife to whom he refers in greatest detail is the one referred to in the Qur'an, *imra'at Zayd*, because the circumstances surrounding his marriage to her raised many questions.⁴⁰

'Abd al-Masīḥ concludes from these that Muḥammad cannot be a prophet.

In the third part of his *Risāla* he goes even further when he speaks of the Qur'an. The question is: Is the Qur'an from God, the Muslim position, or from man, so from Muḥammad, the usual position of non-Muslims, or is it from a third origin, namely Satan, *al-shayṭān*?

'Abd al-Masīḥ prefers the last alternative, on which he stands alone in the Arab Christian tradition. Among Latin and Greek authors this is common, but among Arab Christians he is the only one who states unequivocally that the Qur'an comes from *al-shayṭān*. This condemnation sums up 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī's *Risāla*, of which we have only been able to mention the most salient points.

4. *Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'sī*

We turn next to the *Kitāb al-burhān* of Buṭrus al-Bayt Ra'sī, whose opinion about Muḥammad and Islam are readily understood.

1. The Five Calls are the Five Covenants

Towards the end of the fourth book,⁴¹ there is a very interesting interpretation of Matthew 20.1–16, the parable of the labourers in the vine-

⁴⁰ See Q 33.36–8.

⁴¹ See *Burhān*, paras 361–81.

yard, where the owner makes five calls, the last to workers who come at the eleventh hour but receive the same wage as others hired earlier.⁴²

Buṭrus interprets this parable according to the Patristic tradition, a tradition found as early as Origen, in which the five calls are explained as the five covenants.⁴³ He says the first covenant was with Adam, the second with Noah, the third with Abraham, the fourth with Moses, and the fifth and last with Christ. Incidentally, this is very interesting, for we also find these five calls in the Qur'an: *inna Allāha aṣṭafā Ādama wa-Nūḥan wa-Āla Ibrāhīma wa-Āla 'Imrāna 'alā al-ʿālamīn* (God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrān above all people).⁴⁴ If we understand 'Imrān (who in the Bible is, of course, the father of Moses, Aaron and Miriam), in accordance with Muslim tradition, as the father of Mary as well as of Moses, then we have the five covenants.

Buṭrus says that the first three of these are natural covenants, in which there was no revelation, and Adam, Noah and Abraham did not proclaim any *sharīʿa*: *Wa-hādhihi al-thalāthu al-daʿawātu bi-nāmūsi al-ṭabīʿa*⁴⁵ ('These three calls were by the law of nature').⁴⁶ The other two, through Moses, who brought the scriptural law of the Torah, and through Christ and his apostles, by means of the law of the gospel, are the two *sharīʿas*.

2. Muḥammad has no Covenant

So where does Muḥammad stand in this series? He is not mentioned, because he does not belong to the calls or the covenants. This is a classical Christian way of saying a thing by not saying it.

We find something similar in a Coptic author of the sixth/twelfth century, Abū al-Fakhr Marqus, Ibn al-Shaykh Abū al-Barakāt Mawhūb, al-Maʿrūf bi-Ibn al-Qunbar, known as Marqus Ibn al-Qunbar or Marqus al-Ḍarīr (Mark the Blind).⁴⁷ In his long commentary on the five books of the Torah, when he refers to Abraham and his wives he says that the first son is from Hagar and this is the Old Testament, the second

⁴² For this text and its commentary, see S. K. Samir, "Al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-masīḥī al-qadīm wa-al-Islām", in G. N. Nahhas ed., *Al-Masīḥiyya wa-al-Islām: miryā mutaḡābila*, Balamand, 1997, pp. 69–118, esp. 108–13.

⁴³ J.-L. Déclais, "Les ouvriers de l'onzième heure ou la parabole du salaire contesté (De l'évangile au midrash et au hadīth)", *Islamochristiana* 21, 1995, pp. 43–63.

⁴⁴ Q 3.33.

⁴⁵ Samir, *Al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-masīḥī al-qadīm*, p. 111, no. 27.

⁴⁶ Eutychius of Alexandria, *The Book of Demonstration (Kitāb al-burhān)*, Pt I, trans. W. M. Watt (CSCO 193), Louvain, 1995, pp. 123–58.

⁴⁷ On Marqus, see S. K. Samir, "Vie et oeuvre de Marc Ibn al-Qunbar", in *Christianisme d'Égypte: mélanges René-Georges Coquin (Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte 9)*, Louvain, 1995, pp. 123–58.

is from Sarah, and this is the New Testament (an allusion to Paul, who also compares Hagar and Sarah),⁴⁸ while the third from Keturah has no revelation, no angel and no covenant, but he does have great power, and this is Islam.⁴⁹ This text is very interesting to show how even when reading the Old Testament, Christians in the Islamic world were conscious of a possible Muslim significance.

5. Kitāb al-Mijdal (*fifth/eleventh century*)

We now come to two important, though very different, texts from the two historians: the *Kitāb al-mijdal* from ‘Amr ibn Mattā (fifth/eleventh century), and the *Mukhtaṣar tārikh al-duwal* of Ibn al-‘Ibrī (d. 685/1286).

The *Kitāb al-mijdal*, ‘Book of the Tower’, is written largely in *saḡ*. This important encyclopaedia has not yet been published, nor is our beautiful text edited. It is to be found in part II, chapter 2. I have established the text from the oldest manuscript.⁵⁰

1. Why Christianity Did Not Reach the Ḥijāz

‘Amr relates briefly the history of Christianity in the Arab world, as follows:

*Wa-khalat min du‘āti al-Masīhi arḍu Tihāmata wa-al-Ḥijāz
li-tawwaqufi al-rusuli bi-Najrāna*⁵¹ ‘an al-ijtiyāz,
wa-tashāghulihim bi-man tanaṣṣara min mulūki Kindata wa-salāḥīni al-Yaman,⁵²
alladhīna labisū al-tjāna wa-al-aṭwāqa, wa-jalla amruhum wa-ista‘lan.

(There was no one who preached about the Messiah in the country of Tihāma and the Ḥijāz,

because the apostles stopped at Najrān and went no further.

They were preoccupied with the kings of Kinda and the princes of Yemen, who wore crowns and coronets and who were great and powerful.)

These are the reasons he gives for the whole of Arabia not being converted.

⁴⁸ See Gal. 4.21–31.

⁴⁹ See S. K. Samir, “Marc Ibn al-Qunbar et l’Islam, d’après son commentaire de Genèse 25/1–4”, in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Fouad Éphrem al-Bustani*, forthcoming.

⁵⁰ Paris Arabic 190 (written in Iraq, thirteenth century), 538 folios; here ff. 56r.6–56v.5.

⁵¹ Najrān was a Christian kingdom in pre-Islamic times; see *ET*¹, vol. III, pp. 823–5, art. “Nadjrān”; *ET*², vol. VII, pp. 871–2, art. “Nadjrān”; R. Tardy, *Najrān: Chrétiens d’Arabie avant l’Islam*, Beirut, 1999.

⁵² The kings of Kinda were Christians, and many princes of Yemen as well; see *ET*², vol. V, pp. 118–20, art. “Kinda”.

2. The Coming of Muḥammad the Believer

He continues with the coming of Muḥammad:

Wa-zahara ṣāhibu sharī'ati al-Islām
*Muḥammadum ibn 'Abdallāh al-'Arabī ('alayhi al-salām!);*⁵³
Wa-da'a ahlāhā ilā al-īmāni bi-Allāh
wa-qādahum ilayhi bi-al-ṭawfi wa-al-ikrāh.

(Then the giver of the law of Islam appeared,
 Muḥammad b. 'Abdallah the Arab (upon him be peace!).
 He called their people to faith in God,
 and their response to him was both by free choice and by compulsion.)

This last phrase, *bi-al-ṭawfi wa-al-ikrāh*, is impartial. He does not say that they were converted to Islam *bi-al-ikrāh*, by compulsion, but neither does he say the contrary. They were converted both peacefully and through pressure. He continues:

*Wa-aqtalā'a aṣnāma al-jahāla;*⁵⁴
wa-nakasa rāyāti al-ḍalāla,
wa-jaddada al-masājida buyūtan li-al-ṣalawāt,
wa-wakkada al-waṣāyā bi-al-ṣiyāmi wa-al-zakawāt,
wa-abtala min fawāḥishi al-kufri wa-al-fujūri mā kāna faẓī'an shā'ī'an,
wa-aṭṭala min anṣābi al-ghiwāyāti mā kāna min ittibā'i al-ḥaqqi māni'an.

(He tore down the idols of ignorance,
 lowered the banners of error.
 He renewed the places of worship as houses for prayer;
 he gave firm instructions for fasting and alms-giving.
 He put an end to the detestable and widespread abominations of unbelief and dissipation;
 He did away with the sinful relationships that hindered the inclination towards truth.)

Here he presents Muḥammad proclaiming the true faith in God as good morality, and instituting prayer and the *zakāt*. This is a positive description, with due reference to morality and *tawḥīd*.

3. Muḥammad proclaimed the beliefs of Christianity

But then he does something typically Christian, when he goes on to employ Islamic concepts to say that Muḥammad was in a way a Christian. He says:

⁵³ He uses this respectful expression for Muḥammad (*'alayhi al-salām*) for the sake of the *saḥ*, but he nevertheless does use it.

⁵⁴ Our author adopts some Islamic vocabulary and speaks as Muslims do.

Shahida bi-ṣiḥḥati zuḥūri al-Masīḥ
wa-wakkada amra al-kalimati wa al-rūḥ.

(He witnessed truly to the coming of the Messiah,
 and gave affirmation to the Word and Spirit.)

In the Qur'an we find that Christ is called *Kalimat Allāh*⁵⁵ and *Rūḥ min Allāh*,⁵⁶ and three times *mu'ayyad bi-Rūḥ al-Qyḍus*.⁵⁷ This is not to be taken in a Christian sense, though Christians when they speak with Muslims frequently do interpret these two terms (*Kalima* and *Rūḥ*) according to their own beliefs. The same use of these Qur'anic terms is made by Timothy I.

‘Amr continues:

Wa-ḥaqqqa khurūjahū ilā al-‘ālamī min al-‘Adhrā’i al-ṭāhirati bi-lā ab,
wa-ṣu‘ūdahu ilā al-samā’i ḥayyan bāqīyan bi-lā shakkīn wa-lā rayb.
Wa-naṭaqa fī kitābīhi bi-iqāmātihi al-mawtā,⁵⁸
wa-fathīhi ‘ayyuna al-kumhū⁵⁹ wa-al-aḍirrā,⁶⁰
wa-inḥāḍīhi al-marḍā wa-al-zamnā⁶¹ wa-al-muḥḍādīn,
wa-naḡkkihī rūḥa al-ḥayātī fī majbūlīn min fīn;
wa-kalāmīhi li-al-nāsi fī al-mahdī,
wa-waḍīhi ‘inda al-intihā’i bi-al-‘awdi;
wa-‘azmīhi awṣafa yumīhi wa-barakatīhi,
fī milādīhi wa-mawtīhi wa-ḡiyāmatīhi.

(He confirmed his coming to earth from the pure Virgin without a father,
 and his ascension into heaven alive and immortal without doubt or concealment.

In his book⁶² he related how he [the Messiah] raised the dead,⁶³
 opened the eyes of those born blind⁶⁴ and the blind,

⁵⁵ Q 4.171 (and 3.45).

⁵⁶ Q 4.171.

⁵⁷ Q 2.87, 2.253 and 4.171.

⁵⁸ That is *bi-iqāmāti al-Masīḥ al-mawtā*.

⁵⁹ Plural of *akmah* (born blind).

⁶⁰ Plural of *ḍarīr* (blind).

⁶¹ Plural of *zamīn* (chronically ill).

⁶² He means the Qur'an. This is a descriptive reference, so the Qur'an is logically attributed to Muḥammad, though it has also some theological force for the author.

⁶³ See Q 3.49: *Inni qad jī'tukum bi-āyatīn min Rabbikum: amwī akhluqu la-kum, min al-ṭīnī ka-ḥay'ati al-ṭayri, fa-anfukhu fīhi, fa-yakūnu ṭayran, bi-idhnī Allāh; wa-ubri'u al-aknaha wa-al-abraṣa, wa-uḥyī al-mawtā, bi-idhnī Allāh; wa-umbi'ukum bi-mā ta'kulūna wa-mā taddakhirūna fī buyūtikum* ('I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by God's leave. And I heal those born blind, and the lepers; and I quicken the dead, by God's leave. And I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you, if you believe'); and Q 5.110 (see next footnote).

⁶⁴ See Q 3.49 and 5.110: *Idh qāla Allāhu li-Isā: 'Ṭā Isā bna Maryama, udhkur nīmātī*

revived the sick, the chronically ill and the invalid,⁶⁵
 and blew the spirit of life into something made of mud;⁶⁶
 how he spoke to the people from the cradle,⁶⁷
 and announced his coming back at the end.⁶⁸
 He magnified the characteristics of his good fortune and of his blessing⁶⁹
 in his birth, his death and his resurrection.)⁷⁰

And so on, the text continues for some pages! The author uses the Qur'an here to say that Muḥammad announced Christ and his ministry, though omitting its negative teachings about him.

On the whole, the attitude of the author is very respectful and positive. Muḥammad is described as having a beautiful personality; he is not a conqueror, as he is for others, but he is the one who brought a *sharī'a*, who 'called the people to faith in God'. Yes, they were sometimes compelled to become Muslims, but not always. He introduced prayer, fasting and alms-giving (*ṣalāt*, *ṣiyām*, *zakāt*). But the author never says that Muḥammad was a prophet.

6. *Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Ibrī*

The second historical text is taken from the *Mukhtaṣar Tārīkh al-Duwal* of Ibn al-Ibrī, a great Syrian bishop who died in 685/1286; he wrote his Arabic history round 670/1270. The book is divided according to

'alayka wa-'alā wālidatika, idh ayyadtuka bi-rūḥi al-quḍusi: tukallimu al-nāsa fī al-mahdi wa-kahlan; wa-idh 'allamtuka al-kitāba wa-al-ḥikmata wa-al-Tawrāta wa-al-Injīla; wa-idh takhlūqu min al-ḥni ka-hay'ati al-ṭayri, bi-idhnī, tanfukku fīhā, fa-takūnu ṭayran, bi-idhnī; wa-tubri'u al-akmaḥa wa-al-abraṣa, bi-idhnī; wa-idh tukhriju al-mawtā, bi-idhnī; wa-idh kafaftu Banī Isrā'īla 'anka, idh ji'tahum bi-al-bayyināti, fa-qāla alladhīna kafarū minhum: in hādha illā siḥrun mubīnun' (Then will God say: 'O Jesus son of Mary! Recount my favour to you and to your mother. Behold! I strengthened you with the holy spirit, so that you spoke to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught you the Book and the wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel. And behold! You make out of clay as it were the figure of a bird, by my leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) you, when you showed them the clear signs, and the unbelievers among them said: "This is nothing but evident magic"').

⁶⁵ See Q 3.49 and 5.110 (the Qur'an mentions only the *abraṣ*, leprosy).

⁶⁶ See Q 3.49 and 5.110.

⁶⁷ See Q 3.46; 5.110 and 19.29.

⁶⁸ See Q 43.61: *wa-innahu la-'ilmun li-al-sā'ati, fa-lā tamtarawna bihā* ('And [Jesus] shall be a sign [for the coming of] the hour [of judgment]; therefore have no doubt about it'); see also Q 4.159.

⁶⁹ See Q 19.31: *wa-jā'alanī mubārakan ayna mā kuntu* ('And he has made me blessed wheresoever I be').

⁷⁰ See Q 19.33: *wa-al-salāmu 'alayya yawma wulidtu, wa-yawma amūtu, wa-yawma ub'athu ḥayyan* ('So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life').

dynasties (*duwal*, pl. of *dawla*). The tenth dynasty, which covers almost a third of the whole History, describes the reign of the Arabs down to the Mongol invasion.

1. Account of Muḥammad's Infancy

Abū al-Faraj starts naturally with Muḥammad. Here is his account of Muḥammad's childhood:

Muḥammadun Ibn 'Abdullāh ('alayhi al-salām): Dhakara al-nassābūna anna nis-batahu tartaqī ilā Ismā'īl Ibn Ibrāhīm al-khalīl, alladhī waladat lahu Hājar amatu Sārata zawjahīhi.

(The genealogists say that the family tree of Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh (peace be upon him!) goes back to Ismā'īl son of Abraham, the friend of God, whom Hajar, his wife Sarah's slave, bore to him.)⁷¹

Wa kāna wilāduhu bi-Makkata sanata 892 li-al-Iskandar. Wa-lammā maḍā min 'umrihi sanatāni bi-al-taqribi, māta 'Abdallāh abūhu. Wa-kāna ma'a ummihī Āminata binti Wahbīn sitta sinīnin. Fa-lammā tuwaffiyat, akhadhahu ilayhi jidduhu 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, wa-ḥanna 'alayhi. Fa-lammā ḥaḍarathu al-wafā'u, awṣā ibnahu Abū Tālibin bi-ḥiyātihī, fa-ḍammahu ilayhi wa-kafalahu. Thumma kharaja bihi, wa-huwa ibnu tis'i sinīnin, ilā al-Shām.

(He [Muḥammad] was born in Mecca in the year 892 after Alexander.⁷² When he was about two years old, his father 'Abdallāh died. He remained with his mother, Āmina, the daughter of Wahb, for six years. On her death, his grandfather 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib took him and cared for him. When the latter was nearing death he entrusted him to the care of Abū Tālib, his son, and he took him in as his guardian. Then when he was nine⁷³ he accompanied him to Syria.)⁷⁴

2. The Story of the Monk Baḥīrā

In the rest of his account, Ibn al-'Ibrī is as brief, clear and direct as in this infancy narrative. Let us examine some examples, first of all the story of the Monk Baḥīrā:

Fa-lammā nazalū Buṣrā kharaja ilayhim rāhibun 'arīfun ismuhu Baḥīrā min ṣawmā'atihī, wa-ja'ala yatakhallalu al-qawm ḥattā intahā ilayhi. Fa-akhadhahu bi-yadīhi wa-qāla: 'Sayakūnu min hādihā al-ṣabiyyi anrun 'aẓīmūn, yantashiru dhikruhu fi mashāriqi al-arḍi wa-maghāribihā. Fa-innahu ḥaythu ashrafā aqbalā wa-'alayhi ghamāmatu tuẓallaluhu.'

⁷¹ Ibn al-'Ibrī, no. 1 of my sections.

⁷² Rightly the year 882.

⁷³ Ibn Hishām, the famous author of the *Al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya*, gives his age as ten.

⁷⁴ Ibn al-'Ibrī, nos 2–4 of my sections.

(When they came to Bosra a wise monk named Baḥīrā came out from his cell to meet them. He went through the people and stopped at him. He took him by the hand and said: 'Great things will happen to this child, and he will be remembered in the east and the west. Wherever he goes, he will enter, and above him clouds will shade him.')

⁷⁵

It is interesting to note that he gives these details as factual history, without any such allusions as 'according to what the Muslims say'. Elsewhere in his work Ibn al-ʿIbrī often quotes Ibn al-Qiftī's *Tārīkh al-ḥukamāʾ* directly without expressing any reserve; here, too, he quotes a Muslim source without any comment. The story of Baḥīrā was well-known in Ibn al-ʿIbrī's time among Christians, both in Syriac and in Arabic, though the Christian story, differently from the Muslim, is not favourable to Muḥammad. It is worth noting that our author presents the Muslim version of this story and not the Christian one.

3. The First Raid against Mecca: Badr

Let us take another example, from Ibn al-ʿIbrī's account of one of the *ghazawāt*, namely the famous raid at Badr, which took place in the second year of the hijra (2/624), and where Muslims were victorious:

Wa-fi al-sanati al-thāniyati min hijratihī ilā al-Madīna, kharaja bi-nafsihī ilā ghazāti Badri wa-hiya al-baṭshatu al-kubrā wa-hazama bi-thalāth miʾa wa-thalāthihata ʿashar rajulan min al-Muslimīn alfan min ahli Makkata al-mushrikīn.

(In the second year of his Hijra to Medina, he himself went on the raid at Badr, which was a great encounter: with three hundred and thirteen Muslims he routed a thousand Mekkan polytheists.)⁷⁶

First of all, we note the expression *kharaja bi-nafsihī ilā ghazāti*... (He himself went personally on the raid) which we find twice on this page,⁷⁷ here and in the sixth year (627) against Banū al-Muṣṭaliq. The reason is that our author distinguishes between the *ghazawāt* in which Muḥammad sent his men out and the ones in which he personally led them.

The second remark is that Ibn al-ʿIbrī seems content to accept the Muslim interpretation of the events, as can be seen from two characteristics of his account. One is the *Muslimūn/mushrikūn* distinction, in which he recognises *ahl Makka* as *mushrikūn* and by implication *ahl al-Madīna* as *Muslimūn*. He could have said *al-Madanīyyūn wa-al-Makkiyyūn*, in a more neutral geographical description. The other is that he insists that three hundred and thirteen men defeated more than a thousand, to show that God was with Muḥammad.

⁷⁵ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 5–6 of my sections.

⁷⁶ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, no. 12 of my sections.

⁷⁷ See Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 12 and 20 of my sections.

The Battle of the *Khandaq*

Ibn al-ʿIbrī shows the same partiality to the Muslim point of view in his account of Battle of the Trench (*al-khandaq*), which took place in Dhū al-Qaʿda of the fifth year (April 627).⁷⁸

In a duel provoked by a Meccan, ʿAlī fought with him and killed him, and then killed another Meccan, which was the cause of the defeat of the *Aḥzāb*, the Meccan Confederation, ‘although they were more numerous and had better equipment’ (*wa-kāna qathluhumā sababa hazīmati al-Aḥzābi, ʿalā kathrati ʿadadihim wa-wafrati ʿudadihim*).⁷⁹

This is typical of many such details in which he relates incidents which cast Muḥammad and his Muslim followers in a favourable light without making any comment, showing that he agrees.

5. Musaylima, the ‘False’ Prophet⁸⁰

We will examine one more example:

Wa-ḥi al-sanati al-ʿāshirati, ḥajja ḥijjata al-wadāʿi. Wa-fihā tanabbaʿa bi-al-Yamāmāti Musaylimatu al-kadhdhāb. Wa-jaʿala yusajjīʿu, muḍāhiyan li-al-Qurʾāni, fa-yaqūl . . .

(In the tenth year, [Muḥammad] made his last pilgrimage. In this year, Musaylima the Liar made a show of being a prophet in Yamāma. He started to make rhyming verses (*saʿʿ*), trying to compete with the Qurʾan, saying . . .)⁸¹

Ibn al-ʿIbrī calls him quite unselfconsciously *al-kadhdhāb*, and he quotes a piece of nonsense from him, supposedly in the *saʿʿ* form of the Qurʾan, to show that he really was *kadhdhāb*:

*la-qad anʿama Allāhu ʿalā al-ḥublā,
wa-akhrāja minha nasmatan tiṣāʿa
min bayna ṣifāqin wa-ḥashā.*

(God was gracious to the pregnant one,
and brought forth from her a being of nine months
From within her flesh and womb.)⁸²

⁷⁸ See *EI*², vol. IV, p. 1020, art. “Khandaq”.

⁷⁹ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, no. 18 of my sections.

⁸⁰ See *EI*, vol. III, pp. 745b–746a, art. “Musailima”. Abū Thumāma Maslama ‘began his prophetic career before Muḥammad did’, preaching in the name of Raḥmān to the Banū Ḥanīfa in Yamāma. ‘The prophetic utterances attributed to Musailima recall the earliest Meccan *sūras* with their short rhyming sentences and curious oaths and have no resemblance at all to the later Medinan *sūras*.’

⁸¹ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 25–6 of my sections.

⁸² Ibn al-ʿIbrī, no. 26 of my sections.

In all this Ibn al-ʿIbrī follows the Muslim tradition unquestioningly, even though it is evidently forged at many points: he calls him Musaylima (a contemptuous diminutive), instead of Maslama; he uses the epithet 'the Liar' which was invented by his Muslim opponents; he says that he is trying to imitate the Qur'an with his *saġ*⁸³, while in truth he preceded Muḥammad in claiming prophethood and using *saġ*.

6. Conclusion

As we can see from these few examples, Ibn al-ʿIbrī does not attempt to give a negative image of Muḥammad; on the contrary, we are given a very positive impression. As a historian he apparently believes he can relate facts and follow the Muslim tradition without any difficulty; he does not even criticise his Muslim sources, accepting them without discussion. He goes further, adding twice *'alayhi al-salām!* (Peace be upon him!) after his name,⁸³ as Muslims do for prophets and in particular for Muḥammad.

Does this mean that the bishop Ibn al-ʿIbrī recognises the prophethood of Muḥammad? This is unlikely. He never affirms this and never himself uses the word *nabī* when speaking of him. Abū al-Faraj goes as far as possible in his appreciation of the human personality of Muḥammad, using very courteous speech, adopting Muslim expressions, and so on. But he does not make any concession to any religious affirmation of the prophethood of Muḥammad. He mentions facts, and the prophetic status of Muḥammad is not a fact but an opinion.

7. Timothy I

At last we come to Timothy, who in many respects is the most interesting of these authors who refer to Muḥammad. He presents a very positive appreciation of Muḥammad, but at the same time gives his reasons for rejecting Muḥammad's prophethood.

1. The Textual Problem

There is a textual problem which is well-known. The debate between the catholicos Timothy and the caliph al-Mahdī took place in the year 781AD, in *Arabic*. Timothy then wrote down a sort of minute of the meeting in *Syriac*, in a letter addressed to a monk friend. This

⁸³ Ibn al-ʿIbrī, nos 1 and 27 of my sections. No. 1 is quoted above; here is no. 27: *wa-fī hādhihi al-sanati wa'ika ('alayhi al-salām!) wa-mariḍa* ('In this year [10AH] he (peace be upon him!) became indisposed and became ill').

Syriac text is still unedited, but has been published photographically with an English translation by Alphonse Mingana.⁸⁴

There are two extant Arabic reports of this discussion: a Short Version attested in numerous manuscripts, divided into 27 questions, which is also the older, published for the first time with a French translation by Fr Robert Caspar;⁸⁵ and a Long Version, published first by Fr Louis Cheikho,⁸⁶ and then by myself, dividing it into 275 small sections (verses),⁸⁷ with a French translation by my colleague Fr Hans Putman.⁸⁸

The three texts are similar and yet different. No close comparison of the three recensions has ever been made, which means that they are difficult to use. I have prepared a new edition of the two Arabic versions, dividing them into small sections (verses);⁸⁹ and I have also divided the Syriac/English text in the same way, in order to compare the three recensions. It now remains to adopt a continuous numeration for each of them, giving a single number to identical sentences and a special number to sentences which only appear in one recension or two. According to my experience, this is the best and easiest way (if not the only one) to make the right comparison between them.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ A. Mingana, "The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi", *Woodbrooke Studies* 2, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 1-162.

⁸⁵ R. Caspar, "Les versions arabes du dialogue entre le catholico Timothée I et le calife al-Mahdi (II^e/VIII^e siècle) 'Mohammed a suivi la voie des prophètes'", *Islamochristiana* 3, 1977, pp. 107-75.

⁸⁶ L. Cheikho, "La discussion religieuse entre le calife al-Mahdi et Timothée le catholico" *Al-Machriq* 21, 1921, pp. 359-74, 408-18, repr. in *Trois traités de polémique et de théologie chrétienne*, Beirut, 1923, pp. 1-26.

⁸⁷ S. K. Samir, in H. Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam sous Timothée I (780-823)*, Beirut, 1977, pp. 7-57.

⁸⁸ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, pp. 211-77.

⁸⁹ In my new editions, the Short Arabic Version is divided into 389 verses, and the Long Arabic Version into 745 verses.

⁹⁰ Incidentally, we have the same problem with the three recensions of the Syriac Alexander Romance published by G. J. Reinink, *Das syrische Alexanderlied. Die drei Rezensionen* (CSCO 454 and 455 = Syr. 195 and 196, Leuven, 1983, with a German translation. The editor gives different numbers for each one of the three parallel recensions, so that, if you quote any sentence, you have to say, 'number so-and-so in recension 1, which corresponds to number so-and-so in recension 2, and number so-and-so in recension 3.' Now, with a fourth Arabic recension, the problem is becoming very complicated, making comparison almost impossible.

This kind of problem occurs very often in Oriental Christian literature, when texts were circulated from Church to Church, in different languages and even in the same language. I am proposing here a general rule when dealing with this kind of literature.

2. 'Muḥammad Walked in the Path of the Prophets'

This expression, 'Muḥammad walked in the path of the prophets' or 'followed the way of the prophets' (*salaka fī ṭarīq al-anbiyāʾ*), has become famous in Muslim-Christian dialogue. But do we understand it correctly? Let us read this page in its context, in English translation.⁹¹

The caliph's question is: 'What do you say about Muḥammad?', in other words: 'Who is Muḥammad for you?' Here is Timothy's answer:

- 1 And our gracious and wise King said to me:
 'What do you say about Muḥammad?'
- 2 And I replied to his Majesty:
 'Muḥammad is worthy of all praise,
 by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign.
- 3 *He walked in the path of the prophets,*
 And trod in the track of the lovers of God.
- 4 All the prophets taught the doctrine of one God,
 and since Muḥammad taught
 the doctrine of the unity of God,
- 5 *he walked, therefore,*
 in the path of the prophets.
- 6 Further, all the prophets drove men
 away from bad works,
- 7 and brought them
 nearer to good works.
- 8 And since Muḥammad drove his people
 away from bad works
- 9 and brought them
 nearer to the good ones,
- 10 *he walked, therefore,*
 in the path of the prophets.
- 11 Again, all the prophets separated men
 from idolatry and polytheism,
- 12 and attached them
 to God and to His cult.
- 13 And since Muḥammad separated his people
 from idolatry and polytheism,

⁹¹ The Arabic text was first published by L. Cheikho in 1921 (see n. 86), then by myself in 1977 with a French translation (see nn. 87 and 88), then by Caspar in 1977 with a French translation (see n. 85), then by me with an English translation in 1997 (see S. K. Samir, *The Significance of Early Arab-Christian Thought for Muslim-Christian Understanding*, Washington, 1997, pp. 33–6) and finally by me again in 1997 (S. K. Samir, "Al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-masīḥī al-qadīm wa-al-islām", in G. N. Naḥḥās ed., *Al-Masīḥiyya wa-al-islām*, pp. 31–6).

- 14 and attached them
 to the cult and the knowledge of the one God,
 beside whom there is no other God,
 15 *It is obvious that he walked*
 in the path of all the prophets.
 16 Finally Muḥammad taught
 about God, his Word and His Spirit.⁹²
 17 And since all the prophets had prophesied
 about God, His Word and His Spirit,
 18 *Muḥammad walked, therefore,*
 In the path of all the prophets.

3. Muḥammad is Similar to Moses and Abraham

a) Muḥammad and Moses

- 19 Who will not praise, honour and exalt
 the one who fought for God,
 20 not only in words, but with the sword
 showed also his zeal for Him?
 21 As Moses did with the Children of Israel,
 when he saw that they had fashioned a golden calf which they
 worshipped,
 22 and killed all of those who were worshipping it,
 23 so also Muḥammad evinced
 an ardent zeal towards God,
 24 and loved and honoured Him
 more than his own soul,
 his people and his relatives.
 25 He praised, honoured and exalted
 those who worshipped God with him,
 26 and promised them kingdom,
 praise and honour from God,
 27 both in this world
 and in the world to come in the Garden.⁹³
 28 But those who worshipped idols and not God
 he fought and opposed,
 29 and showed them
 the torments of hell and of the fire
 30 which is never quenched
 and in which all evildoers burn eternally.

⁹² This is a clear allusion to the Trinity.

⁹³ 'The Paradise of the Qur'an' (Mingana's note).

b) Muḥammad and Abraham

- 31 And what Abraham,
 that friend and beloved of God, did
 32 in (p. 62) turning his face from idols and from his kinsmen,
 and looking only towards the one God,
 33 and becoming the preacher of the one God to other peoples,
 this also Muḥammad did.
 34 He turned his face from idols and their worshippers,
 whether those idols were
 those of his own kinsmen or of strangers,
 35 and he honoured and worshipped
 only the one God.

4. Conclusion: Because of this, God honoured him exceedingly

- 36 Because of this,
 God honoured him exceedingly,
 37 and brought low before his feet two powerful kingdoms
 which roared in the world like a lion,
 38 and made the voice of their authority heard
 like thunder in all the earth that is below heaven,
 39 that is, the Kingdom of the Persians
 and that of the Romans.
 40 The former kingdom,
 that is to say the Kingdom of the Persians,
 worshipped creatures instead of the Creator,
 41 and the latter,
 that is to say the Kingdom of the Romans,
 42 attributed suffering and death in the flesh
 to the one who cannot suffer and die
 in any way and through any process.
 43 He further extended the power of his authority
 through the Commander of the Faithful and his children,
 44 from east to west,
 and from north to south.
 45 Who will not praise, O our victorious King,
 the one whom God has praised,
 46 and who will not weave a crown of glory and majesty
 for the one whom God has glorified and exalted?
 47 These and similar things, I and all God-lovers
 utter about Muḥammad, O my sovereign.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ I am following more or less the translation of Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", pp. 61-2, which I have divided and structured (see Samir, *Significance of Early Arab-Christian Thought*, pp. 33-6).

- 48 And our King said to me:
 'You should, therefore, accept the words of the Prophet.'
 49 And I replied to him:
 'About which words does our King speak?'
 50 And our King said to me:
 'That God is one and that there is no other one besides Him.'
 51 And I replied:
 'This belief in the one God, O my Sovereign,
 I have learned from the Torah,
 from the prophets and from the Gospel.
 52 I stand by it
 and shall die in it.'⁹⁵

This text is a very balanced one. Some Christian scholars have interpreted it as a recognition of the prophethood of Muḥammad. In fact, if we read the whole discussion between Timothy and al-Mahdī, we see that when the question is clearly asked he refuses to answer it positively. He is just saying: Muḥammad, in doing this or that, is walking in the path of the prophets (nos 5, 10, 15, 18). He is quoting certain aspects of Muḥammad's life which are similar to those of the prophets, and is not quoting others when he thinks they are not similar.

5. Not a Single Prophecy in the Scriptures Concerns Muḥammad

a) Why do you accept the testimony of the Bible on Christ and not on Muḥammad?

The Caliph feels that the attitude of the Christians is unjust and illogical: Why do they accept the testimony of the Bible concerning Christ and not that concerning Muḥammad?

'How is it that you accept Christ and the Gospel
 from the testimony of the Torah and of the prophets,
 and you do not accept Muḥammad⁹⁶
 from the testimony of Christ and the Gospel?'

And I replied to his Majesty:

'O our King, we have received concerning Christ
 numerous and distinct testimonies from the Torah and the prophets.'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 62.

⁹⁶ 'That the name of Muḥammad is found in Jewish and Christian Books is the claim made in the Qur'an itself, 7.156: "The *ummi* prophet whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel." See also Q 61.6' (Mingana's note).

⁹⁷ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 92-3 (= 237-40) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 32, lines 4-9 (see n. 89 above for an explanation of the numbers in brackets).

b) There is not a single testimony on Muḥammad

And Timothy explains at length the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, concluding:

‘These and scores of other passages of the prophets
show us Jesus Christ in a clear mirror and point to Him.

So far as Muḥammad is concerned

I have not received a single testimony
either from Jesus Christ or from the Gospel
which would refer to his name or to his works.’⁹⁸

And our benevolent and gracious King made a sign
to mean that he was not convinced.

Then he repeated twice to me the question:

‘Have you not received any?’

And I replied to him:

‘No, O God-loving King, I have not received any.’

And the King asked me:

‘Who then is the Paraclete?’⁹⁹

At this point, Timothy explains who the Paraclete is, showing that the Paraclete mentioned in the Gospel of John cannot be identified with Muḥammad. He concludes:

‘And since the one who is not the Spirit of God
is by inference not the Paraclete, Muḥammad is not the Paraclete.

If he were mentioned in the Gospel,

this mention would have been marked by a distinct portraiture,
characterizing his coming, his name, his mother, and his people,
as the true portraiture of the coming of Jesus Christ
is found in the Torah and in the prophets.

Since nothing resembling this is found in the Gospel concerning Muḥammad,

it is evident that there is no mention of him in it at all,
and that is the reason why I have not received

a single testimony from the Gospel about him.’¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, no. 101 (= 261–3) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 33, lines 7–11.

⁹⁹ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, nos 102–4 (= 264–7) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 33, lines 12–16.

¹⁰⁰ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, no. 121 (= 306–8) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 35, lines 7–17. ‘The bulk of Muslim testimony, based on Q 7.156, is to the effect that the name of Muḥammad is found in the Gospel. Almost all the work of [‘Alī] Ibn Rabban [al-Ṭabarī] entitled *Kitāb ad-dīn wa-ad-dawla* has been written for the purpose of showing that this name is found in Jewish and Christian scriptures, (see especially pp. 77–146 of my translation) Cf. Ibn Sa‘ad’s *Ṭabaqāt*, I, ii, 89 and I, i, 123, and see the commentator Tabarī on Q 7.156, and the historians Ibn Hisham and Tabarī (Mingana’s note).

Later on the Caliph quotes from the Old Testament two texts well-known in Muslim apologetics : Deuteronomy 18.15 and Isaiah 21.7. Regarding Dt. 18.15 ('I will raise you up a prophet from among your brethren like unto me'), the Muslim apologetic tradition interprets this text as a prophecy concerning Muḥammad. Timothy analyses the sentence grammatically, showing that the expressions 'from among your brethren' (*min bayni ikhwatikum*) and 'like unto me' (*mithli*) cannot be applied to Muḥammad.¹⁰¹ As for Is. 21.7, the Muslim tradition interprets the rider of the camel (*rākib al-jamal*) as being Muḥammad, and the rider of the ass (*rākib al-ḥimār*) as Jesus, because he entered Jerusalem on an ass. Timothy shows, based on five arguments, that this is historically impossible and that the text is not a prophecy about Muḥammad and Jesus, but about the Medes and the Persians, and specifically that the one riding a camel is Cyrus the Persian and the one riding an ass is Darius the Mede.¹⁰²

c) If there were, I would have moved from the Gospel to the Qur'an
The Caliph accuses the Christians of having refused Muḥammad as the Jews had refused Christ and Timothy answers:

'As for us, we have not accepted Muḥammad
because we have not a single testimony about him in our Books.'
And our King said:
'There were many testimonies,
but the Books have been corrupted, and you have removed them.'¹⁰³

This is the classical Muslim accusation against Jews and Christians of corruption of the Scriptures (*tahrīf* or *tabdīl al-kutub*). Timothy refutes the accusation and concludes:

'To tell the truth, if I had found in the Gospel a [single] prophecy
concerning the coming of Muḥammad,
I would have moved from the Gospel to the Qur'an,
as I have moved from the Torah and the Prophets to the Gospel.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, nos 228–37 (= 614–39) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 50, line 22—p. 52, line 2.

¹⁰² Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, nos 134–49 (= 345–81) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 37, line 8—p. 38, line 23.

¹⁰³ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, nos 123–4 (= 313–6) (with a slight addition after the first sentence: *fa-li-dhālika laysa lanā dhanbun fī hādihā*, 'that is why there is no blame attached to us in this') = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 35, lines 23–7.

¹⁰⁴ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, no. 129 (= 329–31) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 36, lines 18–20.

6. No Prophet after John the Baptist

His reply then leads to the question, 'Do you not recognise that Muḥammad was a prophet?' Timothy introduces some new reasons to explain why he does not.

First of all, he says, because there was no prophet after Jesus Christ, the last being Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyya, John the Baptist. To support this theological affirmation he quotes both the Old and New Testaments, for example, *Inna al-nubuwwata lā tuḍamu minhu ilā an ya'tiya alladhī tantaziruhu al-umamu* ('Prophecy will not pass from it until the one comes whom the nations await') (Gen. 49.10, Peshitta version). In all the texts he quotes the key word is 'until' (*ilā an*, or *ḥattā*) which means that after this the process stops. Here is the first text:¹⁰⁵

'And I replied: "Because the prophet Jacob said:
'The sceptre of the Kingdom shall not depart from Judah,
nor an utterer of prophecy from his seed,
until the Christ come,

because the Kingdom is His,

and He is the expectation of the peoples.'¹⁰⁶

In this he shows that after the coming of the Christ
there will be neither prophet nor prophecy.

And Daniel also concurs in saying that

for putting an end to all vision and prophecy,

and for the coming of Christ, the King,

seven weeks and threescore and two weeks will elapse,

and then the Christ will be killed,

and there will not be any more

Kingdom and prophecy in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷

In this he showed that visions and prophecies

will come to an end with the Christ.

And the Christ Himself said:

"The prophets and the Torah prophesied *until John*."¹⁰⁸

Every prophecy, therefore, ended with the time of Christ,

and after Christ there was no prophecy, nor did any prophet rise."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, nos 151-3 (= 383-93) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 38, line 24—p. 39, line 10.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 49.10 (Peshitta with slight changes).

¹⁰⁷ Dan. 9.24-5.

¹⁰⁸ Mt. 11.13.

¹⁰⁹ 'The last of the prophets, according to Muslim apologists, is Muhammad: "If the Prophet had not appeared, the prophecies of the prophets about Ishmael and about the Prophet who is the last of prophets would have necessarily become without object." Ibn Rabban's Apology, the *Kitāb ad-Dīn*, p. 77 of my edition *et passim* (Mingana's note).

Towards the end of the Debate, Timothy turns back to the argument at some length.¹¹⁰ Let us quote the first section of this:

‘And our King said to me:
 “If you accepted Muḥammad as a prophet
 your words would be beautiful and your meanings fine.”
 And I replied to his Majesty:
 “We find that there is only one prophet
 who would come to the world
 after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven
 and His descent from heaven.¹¹¹
 This we know from the prophet Malachi
 and from the angel Gabriel
 when he announced the birth of John to Zechariah.”
 And our King said:
 “And who is that prophet?”
 And I replied: “The prophet Elijah.”’

Timothy then quotes several biblical texts¹¹² to show that John the Baptist is in fact Elijah, and that John identified Jesus as the Messiah. Two are particularly important, the prophecy of Malachi and the saying of Christ:

‘Know that I am going to send you Elijah the prophet
 before my day comes, that great and terrible day.
 He shall turn the hearts of fathers towards their children
 and the hearts of children towards their fathers,
 lest I come and strike the land with a curse.’¹¹³
 “Because it was towards John
 that all the prophecies of the prophets and of the Law were leading.
 And he, if you will believe me,
 is the Elijah who was to return.
 If anyone has ear to hear,
 let him listen!’¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'islam*, nos 238–47 (= 640–72) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 54, line 15—p. 55, line 33. This section is absent from the Short Arabic Text.

¹¹¹ ‘That the line of defence of the Christians against the Muslims of the eighth and ninth centuries was to the effect that no prophet will rise after Christ is borne out by the Muslim apologist, ‘Alī Rabbān Ṭabarī, who in his Apology (*Kitāb ad-Dīn*, pp. 15, 17–18 of my edition) quotes against the Christians, Acts 11.24 and 13.9, in which St Luke speaks of prophets. On the Christian side it is well emphasised by the apologist Kindi in his *Risālah*, p. 78’ (Mingana’s note).

¹¹² Lk. 1.13–17; Jn 1.29; Mt. 3.11 and Lk. 3.16.

¹¹³ Mal. 3.23–4. This prophecy is quoted by Luke (Lk. 1.17), who applies it to John. See also Ecclesiasticus 48.10.

¹¹⁴ Mt. 11.13–15. Compare Lk. 16.16: Up to the time of John it was the Law and the Prophets. Since then, the kingdom of God has been preached.

And Timothy concludes:¹¹⁵

‘Both messengers, John and Elijah,
are from one power of the Spirit,
with the difference that one already came before Christ
and the other is going to come before Him,
and their coming is similar
and to the same effect.
In the second coming
Christ will appear from heaven in a great glory of angels,
to effect the resurrection of the children of Adam from the graves.
As Word of God, He created everything from the beginning
and He is going to renew everything at the end.
He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
and there is no end and no limit to His Kingdom.’

7. Christ Warned Us against Anyone Claiming Prophethood

One more point is to be found only in the Short Arabic Version: *Thumma ḥadhdharanā min qabīlī al-anbiyā’i wa-al-musahā’i al-wāridīna ba’dā wurūdihi* (‘Then he warned us against accepting the prophets and christs who may come after his coming’).¹¹⁶ This is a clear allusion to the eschatological discourse of Christ:

‘Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many. And with the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold.’¹¹⁷ ‘If anyone says to you then: “Look, here is the Christ”, or “Look, he is there”, do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and produce great signs and portents, enough to deceive even the chosen, if that were possible. You therefore must be on your guard. I have forewarned you of everything!’¹¹⁸

Timothy follows completely the saying of Christ who makes it clear that no prophet and no Christ could come after Him. The catholicos applies this warning to Muḥammad, who cannot therefore be a prophet, even though he claims to be.

8. Christ Brought the Perfection and Culmination of Human Development, so there is no Need for any Other Prophet

This argument can be found in different sections of the Debate, with slight differences in the three versions. It can be divided into four smaller arguments.

¹¹⁵ Putman, *L’Eglise et l’Islam*, nos 246–7 (= 668–72) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 55, para. 3.

¹¹⁶ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, no. 228.

¹¹⁷ Mt. 24.11–12.

¹¹⁸ Mk 13.21–3 (cf. Mt. 24.23–5).

a) Christ gave us all that was necessary

In the Short Arabic Version, Timothy insists that Christ gave us all that was necessary (for this world and for the next), so that we do not need anything more or anyone else:

*Wa-aydan fa-al-Masīḥ lam yadaʿ
 ʿilman wa-lā ʿamalan, wa-lā waʿdan wa-lā waʿīdan,
 yaḡibu an yūridahu, illā awradahu.
 Wa-li-hādhā ḥadhdhara min qabīli ḡayrihi
 la-allā yakhruja binā ʿan al-wāḡib.*

(‘Further,¹¹⁹ Christ did not leave
 any knowledge or deed, any promise or threat,¹²⁰
 which he should have brought, without bringing it.
 This is why he warned [us] not to accept another than Him,
 lest he should lead us away from what is required.’)¹²¹

b) Christ directed us to divine knowledge, so that human knowledge is not necessary

The second argument is that Christ gave us the highest knowledge, the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. So any human and earthly knowledge is unnecessary. Obviously, for Timothy Islam and the Qurʾan are seen as human and earthly. We find this argument in the Long Arabic and in the Syriac Versions:¹²²

*Wa-al-Masīḥ ʿallamanā ʿan malakūti al-samāʾi;
 fa-lam yaʿūd yufīdunā an naktasība maʿrifatan ukhrā
 dāʾira (sic) al-umūri al-bashariyyati wa-al-arḍiyyati,
 baʿda iktisābinā maʿrifatan
 ʿan sirri al-lāhūti wa-malakūti al-samāʾ.*

(‘Christ directed us to the Kingdom of Heaven.
 And it is superfluous, after the knowledge that we have
 of God and the Kingdom of Heaven,
 that we should be brought down to the knowledge
 of human and the earthly things.’)

¹¹⁹ In Medieval Arabic texts a sentence beginning with *wa-aydan* (corresponding to ‘further’) opens a new argument.

¹²⁰ In Arabic these two pairs of words (*ʿilm/ʿamal*, *waʿd/waʿīd*) include every possible thing in any kind of human action or reflection. In other words, Christ brought everything that was necessary.

¹²¹ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, nos 229–30.

¹²² Putman, *L’Eglise et l’Islam*, no. 154 (= 397–8) = Mingana, “Timothy’s Apology”, p. 39, lines 11–4.

c) Christianity is the climax of human development

Timothy's third argument is that Christianity is 'the climax of human development' (*qimmat al-tatawwur al-basharī*), as the philosopher Yaḥyā Ibn 'Adī said in his treatise on the necessity for the Incarnation. This being so, we do not need to go back to what has been superseded. Here is Timothy's text, which is found in the Syriac and the Long Arabic versions:¹²³

'As for the prophets, they prophesied sometimes
concerning the earthly affairs and kingdom,¹²⁴
and at other times
concerning the adorable Epiphany and Incarnation of the Word-God.
As for Jesus Christ, he did not reveal to us things
dealing with the Law¹²⁵ and earthly affairs,
but he solely taught us things
dealing with the knowledge of God and the Kingdom of Heaven.'

There is a clear distinction here between the Old and the New Testaments: the Old Testament deals with 'earthly affairs' and the coming of the Word; Jesus Christ in the New Testament 'solely taught us things dealing with the knowledge of God and the kingdom of heaven'. But I think that in the third sentence which says, 'Jesus Christ did not reveal to us things dealing with the Law and earthly affairs' there is a clear allusion to Islamic *sharī'a*.

d) The divine economy always goes from human to divine things, not *vice-versa*

The Syriac text and the Long Arabic Version¹²⁶ present the familiar account of the divine economy (*tadbīr*):

'A good and praiseworthy order of things
is that which takes us up from the bottom to the top,
from human to divine things
and from earthly to heavenly things.
But an order which would lower us
from the top to the bottom,

¹²³ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, no. 155 (= 399–401) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 38, lines 15–20. This has no equivalent in the Short Arabic Version.

¹²⁴ The Arabic text is clearer: '*an umūri hādihā al-ālamī wa-mamālikihī* ('concerning the affairs of this world and its kingdoms').

¹²⁵ The Arabic text does not have this very important word, which corresponds to *sharī'a*.

¹²⁶ Putman, *L'Eglise et l'Islam*, no. 157 (= 405–8) = Mingana, "Timothy's Apology", p. 39, lines 26–31.

from the divine to the worldly,
from heavenly to earthly things, is bad and blameworthy.’

Timothy says no more, but the meaning is very clear. Christ brought us to the top, and there could be no more upward advance after this: any other step would be a step backwards, as is clearly said in the Short Arabic Version:¹²⁷

*Waʿādatu al-tadbīri al-ilāhi an yaʿada binā
min asfalū ilā faʿwu,
min al-arḍiyyāti ilā . . . al-samāʾiyyāt;
lā an yaruddanā ilā khalfu,
wa-yahuttanā min al-samāʾiyyāti ilā al-arḍiyyāt;
ka-hāli al-Tawrāti wa-al-Injīl.*

(‘The ordinary divine economy
is to take us up from the bottom to the top,
from earthly to heavenly things;
and not to bring us backward
and to lower us from heavenly to earthly things;
such is the case with the Torah and the Gospel.’)¹²⁸

9. Which Religion is the True Religion?

ʿAmr Ibn Mattā reported¹²⁹ that Timothy, asked by the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (170/786–193/809) which religion is the true one, answered spontaneously:

The true religion ‘is the one whose laws and commandments are similar to God’s doings in the creation’ (*alladhī sharāʾihū wa-waṣāyāhu tushākilu afʿāla Allāhi fī khalqihī*). And the Caliph admired Timothy, who did not mention any religion, but alluded to the Christian faith which commands: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven,¹³⁰ for he causes his sun to rise on bad men as well as good, and his rain to fall on honest and dishonest men alike.’¹³¹

¹²⁷ Timothy, Short Arabic Version, nos 231–2.

¹²⁸ The author of the Arabic text means to say that, for a Christian, to accept the Qurʾān (which supposedly only speaks of earthly matters) would be a retrograde downhill step, similar to reverting from the Gospel to the Torah.

¹²⁹ See *Maris Amri et Slibae de Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria*, ex codicibus Vaticanis edidit Henricus Gismondi, SJ, pars altera Amri et Slibae textus (Latin trans.), Rome, 1897, p. 38.6–21; *ibid.* (Arabic text), Rome 1896, p. 65.11–20.

¹³⁰ The Arabic text adapts here this shocking expression ‘be sons of your Father’, by saying *wa-kūnū mutashabbihūna bi-Abīkum* (‘be similar to your Father’).

¹³¹ Mt. 5.44–5.

8. Conclusion

We can conclude this short survey by identifying three elements in these Christian accounts.

Good Knowledge of Islam as well as of Christianity

Reading these Arab Christian documents one is struck by the very detailed information these authors had about Muḥammad. The historical account of Muḥammad's life presented by Ibn al-ʿIbrī for instance is based on the best Muslim sources. Arab Christians are usually neutral and objective, and they sometimes speak in a very positive way when dealing with the historical figure of Muḥammad.

Their information about the Qur'an too is solid: not only do they quote the text faithfully and loyally, but they also respect the interpretation usually given by Muslims. Their use of the Qur'an to confirm Christian revelation was normal apologetic practice, but they do not usually distort its sense.

Objectivity and Openness with Theological Discernment

The second characteristic of these texts is the theological discernment shown in their debates. It is clear that none of these Arab Christian authors recognises Muḥammad as a prophet. In this respect the meaning which is sometimes derived today from Timothy's beautiful words *salaka fī sabīl al-anbiyā'* has nothing to do with Timothy's own interpretation. What he himself meant was that Muḥammad, *by doing so and so*, walked after the prophets. Thus, *only in a certain sense* did he walk in the path of the prophets.

So these Christian authors' theological position is very clear, though nuanced. Muḥammad was not a prophet, nor *khātam al-nabiyyīn*, although he did good things for many people by bringing them his religion. This positive estimation is very clear in most texts.

The Importance of Arab Christian Theology for Muslim-Christian Dialogue

Our last remark concerns the pertinence of their reflection for our own time. Let us take an example. They say that the relation between Muḥammad and God was such that God supported him in his conquests. This is an answer pertinent to the question which Christians in the Arab world ask today: 'But why, if Islam is not the true religion, did it spread so widely through the whole world?' Timothy, like Ibrāhīm al-Ṭabarānī and others, provides an oblique answer: Muḥammad

was supported by God. When we read his words, we are tempted to think that he is speaking diplomatically. But he is not, in fact. In his way of thinking, if the Muslims of his own time were stronger than the Rūm, it is because God was with them. So in a way Timothy is allowing that Muḥammad had something from God, but only in a way.

The position reflected in these texts is one which could be very useful today. For the Arab Christian writers were honest with themselves and with their religion. They could not believe about Muḥammad what Muslims believed and be at the same time Christians. They could not say that Muḥammad was a prophet, because in that case he would not only be *a* prophet, but *the* prophet, the seal of the prophets (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*). With the single exception of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī, they never said Muḥammad came from Satan or that he was simply saying what someone else (Baḥīrā for instance) was dictating to him.

They admitted that Muḥammad had done many good things, *humanly and spiritually*, though they made clear that he had also done things that were contrary to Christian revelation. In this they were showing themselves objective and open-minded, very straightforward in their discussions, and faithful to their own convictions.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ‘ABD AL-MASĪḤ, SUPERIOR OF MOUNT SINAI (QAYS AL-GHASSĀNĪ)

Mark N. Swanson

Introduction

In the following pages I shall be revisiting a medieval Arabic Christian text, *The Martyrdom of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ, Superior of Mount Sinai*, which is undoubtedly familiar to many readers. Two ancient copies of it are available to scholars: an older one in *Sinai Arabic* 542, of the late third/ninth or early fourth/tenth century; and another in *British Library oriental* 5019, also originally of Mt Sinai, from the fifth/eleventh century.¹ Both manuscripts are available in microform, and the slightly different recensions of the story that they offer have both been published: Ḥabīb Zayyāt published the British Library recension sixty years ago in *Al-Mashriq*,² and Sidney Griffith’s edition of the older Sinai recension appeared in *Le Muséon* in 1985, along with an English translation and a thorough historical study that persuasively places the martyrdom in the 860s AD.³ Very recently, the story has been reproduced

¹ Other witnesses to the text include a fourth/tenth century manuscript of Mt Sinai that was destroyed by fire in Leiden (*Hiersenann MS 14* in his *Katalog 500*); a table of contents to a Sinai manuscript preserved in Birmingham (as *Mingana Christian Arabic* 248 [Add. 172]); and a seventh/thirteenth century *menologion* of Mt Sinai (*Sinai Arabic* 396) that was not filmed by the Library of Congress/University of Alexandria expedition of 1950.

² Ḥabīb Zayyāt, “Shuhadā’ al-Naṣrāniyya fī al-Islām”, *Al-Mashriq* 36, 1938, pp. 463–5.

³ S. H. Griffith, “The Arabic Account of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ an-Naṣrānī al-Ghassānī”, *Le Muséon* 98, 1985, pp. 331–74. On the martyr’s dates, see pp. 352–7.

A few errors have crept into Griffith’s edition of the martyrdom, which may be corrected according to the following chart, which gives the page and line numbers of incorrect readings in Griffith’s edition, followed by the correct (or more probable) readings from *Sinai Arabic* 542, ff. 65r–67r.

Page	Line	Printed Text	Manuscript
362	2	ويسترلوه	ويسترلوه
	12	تسمعه قال	يسمعه فقال
363	9	أبيض	أبيض
364	4	صلاحه	صلاحه
	6	خرج	فخرج

in an Arabic collection of *vitae* of 'forgotten saints in the Antiochian tradition',⁴ while Robert Hoyland has provided an English summary in his compendium of non-Muslim writings on early Islam.⁵

My aims in this essay are modest, given that the text is well known and has been subjected to careful historical study. First, after a quick review of the story itself, I shall offer a few comments about the *name* of the saint. Then I shall take a brief look at the literary context within which the text is to be read. Finally, examining *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ* against the background of that literary context, I shall focus on some of the unique features of this text, and hazard some suggestions as to how it functioned *as a work of edification* within the Christian community in which it was read and pondered. While I am not indifferent to questions concerning the 'authenticity' of the saint, or to

Page	Line	Printed Text	Manuscript
	10	وصيره	وصيره
	11	سنة	سنتين
365	4	صيره	صيره
366	3	قروا	قرو
		صاروا	صارو
	6	فذهبوا	فذهبو
	10	فقام	فأقام
	11	صيره	صيره
367	1	فلسطين	فلسطين
	3	يدوروا	يدورو
	3	نظر	نظرو
	5	الغساني	قيس الغساني
	13	وطلبوا	وطلبو
	13	وقالوا	وقالو
	15	نفسى	بنفسى
368	8	شهد	يشهد
	9	الله	فما
369	1	أشهر	أشهر
		فكلموا	فكلمو
	2	سيره	شأنه (?)
	4	ناموا	نامه
	9	فرح	ففرح
	12	تهاربوا	وتهاربوا

It should be noted that the addition of *alif otiosum* to يدورو on p. 367, line 3, and to يخرجو on p. 369, line 1, was deliberate, an attempt to conform to the scribe's normal usages. On the scribe's use of *alif otiosum*, see Griffith, 'Account', p. 360.

⁴ Tūmā Biṭār ed., *Al-qiddīsūn al-masīyyūn fī al-turāth al-Anṭākī*, Beirut, 1994, pp. 293–300.

⁵ R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13)*, Princeton NJ, 1997, pp. 381–3.

the contributions that hagiographical research can offer the social historian, my chief interest here is the role that the text, and others like it, may have played in the formation of a distinctively Christian imagination and the preservation of a distinctively Christian 'culture' among Melkites⁶ living within the *Dār al-Islām*.

The Story of Qays al-Ghassānī

Qays ibn Rabīʿ ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī was an exemplary youth from the community of Arab Christians that originally hailed from Najrān, in the south of the Arabian peninsula. As a young man of twenty he set out on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but his Muslim travelling companions prevailed upon him to join them in the annual expeditions against Byzantine territory.⁷

فجَاهَدَ مَعَهُمْ وَقَاتَلَ وَقَتَلَ وَنَهَبَ وَأَحْرَقَ، وَوَطِئَ كُلَّ مَحْرَمٍ كَفَعْلِهِمْ،
وَصَلَّى مَعَهُمْ. وَصَارَ عَلَى الرُّومِ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ غَيْظًا وَأَقْسَى قَلْبًا.⁸

He participated in the *jihād* with them. He fought, killed, plundered, burned, and trampled every taboo as they did. And he prayed with them. He surpassed them in the severity of his rage and in the hardness of his heart against the Byzantines.

After thirteen years of life as a Muslim *ghāzī*, Qays chanced to encounter a priest in a church of Baalbek.⁹ When he heard a text from the Gospels read, he began to weep copiously, eliciting a kindly inquiry. Expressing his sorrow at having become an enemy of 'this Gospel', he told the priest his story.

⁶ On the precise sense of the word 'Melkite', see Sidney Griffith's contribution to this volume.

⁷ All Arabic texts in this section are from my own working edition of the text as it stands in *Sinai Arabic* 542, ff. 65r–67r; compare that of Griffith, "Account", pp. 361–70. I have kept modifications to the consonantal skeleton of words to a minimum, and have indicated changes with the following superscript symbols:

^a: *alif mandūda* is found in the MS where standard usage requires *alif maksūra*, or *vice versa*.

^b: final *alif* indicating *tanwīn* is omitted where required by standard usage, or found where not allowed.

^c: final *alif* following *waw* is improperly omitted or added, according to standard usage.

Square brackets [] indicate my addition of words or letters to the text.

I have freely added *hamza*, *shadda* (etc.), some *tashkīl*, and punctuation.

⁸ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65r; Griffith, "Account", p. 362, lines 5–7.

⁹ I shall use this conventional English spelling rather than the more accurate Baʿlabakk.

فلَمَّا أَعْلَمَ الْقَسَّ بِخَبْرِهِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ الْقَسَّ: فَأَيْشَ يَمْنَعُكَ، إِنْ كُنْتُ
 نَادِمًا؟ أَنْ تَرْجِعَ وَتَتُوبَ؟
 فَقَالَ لَهُ الْغَسَّانِيُّ: إِنَّ الْأَمْرَ عَظِيمٌ جَدًّا، وَأَنَا أَعْرِفُ مِنْ نَفْسِي مَا لَا
 تَحْتَمِلُهُ الْجِبَالُ وَلَا الْأَرْضَيْنِ!
 فَقَالَ لَهُ الْقَسَّ: أَلَمْ تَسْمَعْ الْإِنْجِيلَ يَقُولُ، «إِنَّ الَّذِي لَا يَطِيقُوا النَّاسَ،
 هُوَ عَلَى اللَّهِ سَهْلٌ؟» وَقَالَ أَيْضًا، «إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْرَحُ بِرَجْعَةِ خَاطِئٍ وَاحِدٍ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ
 مِائَةِ صَدِّيقٍ». نَعَمْ، يَا ابْنِي الْحَبِيبِ، أَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَسْرَعَ إِلَيْنَا مِنْهُ إِلَيْهِ. أَنْتَ
 قَدْ قَرَأْتَ الْإِنْجِيلَ، كَمَا ذَكَرْتَ لِي. فَاذْكُرِ اللَّصَّ، وَالابْنَ الشَّاطِرَ.¹⁰

When he had made his account known to the priest, the priest said to him: 'What prevents you, if you are remorseful, from returning and repenting?'

Al-Ghassānī said to him: 'The matter is exceedingly great; I know things about myself which the mountains and the two earths [?] cannot bear!'

The priest said to him: 'Have you not heard the Gospel say, "That which humans cannot endure is easy for God"?'¹¹ It also says, "God rejoices more in the return of one sinner than in a hundred righteous."¹² Yes, my beloved brother, know that God is swifter to us than we are to him! You have read the Gospel, as you mentioned to me. Remember the thief,¹³ and the prodigal son!¹⁴

Qays did repent, was absolved and communicated by the kindly priest, and after a visit to Patriarch John in Jerusalem became a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas, where he remained five years as a disciple to a spiritual master. Then, after a tour of the monasteries in the vicinity of Jerusalem, he proceeded to Mt Sinai, where his devotion and service to the monks led to his being appointed οἰκονόμος (*uqnūm*, steward) of the monastery.

It was after five years of such service that 'Abd al-Masīḥ (as he was now known) conceived a desire to 'make his affair known'—that is, to make a public profession of his re-conversion to Christianity. Going to al-Ramla in Palestine with two devoted monks, he wrote a letter—

¹⁰ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65r-v, Griffith, "Account", p. 363, line 6—p. 364, line 3.

¹¹ The given text combines features of Mt. 10.37 and Lk. 14.26.

¹² Lk. 15.7.

¹³ Lk. 23.39–43.

¹⁴ Lk. 15.11–32.

«أنا هو قيس بن ربيع بن يزيد الغساني النجرائي. من قصصني كذا وكذا. وقد تنصرتُ وتراهبتُ، شوقاً» متي ورغبةً في النصرانية. وأنا في الكنيسة نازل. إن أردتموني، فاطلبوني هناك.¹⁵

‘I am Qays ibn Rabī‘ ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī. My story is thus-and-thus. I have become a Christian and a monk, out of my own longing and my desire for Christianity. I am lodging in the church. If you want me, seek me there.’

—which he threw into the city’s principal mosque. When it was read, an incensed mob set off for the lower church (of St Kyriakos) where ‘Abd al-Masīḥ and his companions were waiting. But then the unexpected happened:

فداروها كلها داخلًا خارجًا وفوق وأسفل، وهو جالس مع الرهبين، ولم يروه، لأن الله أعماهم عنه. فقام ومشى قدأهم ليره، فلم يروه. فذهبوا إلى الكنيسة فوقًا ليطلبوه، ورجعوا إلى السفلى. فما قدروا عليه، وكانوا يزحموه، وقد أعماهم الله عنه.¹⁶

They made the rounds of the [church] inside and out, from top to bottom, while he was seated [there] with the two monks. They did not see him, because God blinded them to him. He got up and walked in front of them so that they would see him, but still they did not see him! They went to the upper church to seek him, and then returned to the lower. They were unable to seize him—despite the fact that they were jostling him!—because God had blinded them to him.

‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s companions immediately offered an explanation of these strange events.

«يا أباونا، إن الله لم يحب أن يظهر أمرك لهم. ولو علم أنك تصبر اليوم، لعرّفهم بك. فإذ كان الله لم يهرّ ذلك، فلا تقاوم أمر الله!»¹⁷

‘Our father, God has not desired to make your affair known to them. If He had known that you were to undergo [martyrdom]¹⁸ today, He

¹⁵ *Sinai Arabic* 542, ff. 65v–66r, Griffith, “Account”, p. 365, lines 8–10.

¹⁶ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66r, Griffith, “Account”, p. 366, lines 4–7.

¹⁷ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66r, Griffith, “Account”, p. 366, lines 7–9.

¹⁸ The word used in the text, *tasbiru*, appears to reflect the Greek ὑπομένω, frequently used in the context of martyrdom.

would have made you known to them. Therefore, if God did not desire that, do not resist the command of God!’

After three days ‘Abd al-Masīḥ departed from al-Ramla, visited Edessa, and then made his way back to Mt Sinai where he was made *raʾīs*, the former superior having died in his absence.

Seven years later it became necessary for ‘Abd al-Masīḥ to travel in person to Palestine in order to deal with the unjust tax demands of a Muslim official. At a place called Ghadyān he and his companions chanced upon groups of Muslim pilgrims returning from Mecca. One of the pilgrims, it turned out, was one of ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s companions from his raiding days. He recognized the former *ghāzī* in a monk’s habit:

فتعلق به وقال له، «أليس أنت قيس الغساني؟» فقال له، «ما أدري ما تقول.»¹⁹

And he clung to him and said, ‘Are you not Qays²⁰ al-Ghassānī?’ He said to him, ‘I do not know what you are saying.’

The man persevered, however, and having identified the monk before him as his former companion in *jihād* and *ṣalāt* by means of a hidden scar, had ‘Abd al-Masīḥ and his three companions seized and bound. Not, however, very effectively: ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s companions were able to free themselves, and they urged their superior to flee by night.

وقالوا له، «نحن نقيم معهم، ليعملوا بنا ما أرادوا، ونبدل أنفسنا دونك.»
أجابهم قائلاً، «أنا أحق أن أكون فداكم بنفسي.»²¹

They said to him, ‘We will remain with them, to do with us what they will, and offer ourselves in your stead.’ He answered them saying, ‘It is more fitting that I should be *your* ransom, by myself.’

No one fled, and with great fanfare ‘Abd al-Masīḥ was escorted into the presence of the governor at al-Ramla. There the final act of the drama unfolded quickly:

فقال له الوالي، «استحي لنفسك، لأنك رجل ذو شرف وقدر.»
فقال له عيد المسيح، «الحياء من إلهي المسيح أوجب من الحياء
منك! فافعل ما أحببت.»

¹⁹ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66r. Griffith, “Account”, p. 367, lines 4–5.

²⁰ This word is omitted in Griffith, “Account”, p. 367, line 5 (text) and p. 373, line 11 (translation).

²¹ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66v, Griffith, “Account”, p. 367, lines 13–15.

فطلب عليه مَنْ يشهد، فشهد عليه خلق بما لم يعرفوا. فحبسه ثلاثة أيام. ثم أخرجه فأعرض عليه الإسلام. فما قبل منه، وأساء سماعه الجواب. فاغتاظ لذلك، فأمر بضرب رقبة. فتموا ذلك بالفعل.²²

The governor said to him, ‘Be ashamed²³ of yourself! For you are a man of high birth and dignity!’

‘Abd al-Masīḥ replied, ‘Shame from Christ my God is more compelling than shame from you! Do what you like.’

And [the governor] sought [people] to bear witness against him, and a group of people bore witness to what they did not know. Then he imprisoned him for three days. After that he brought him out and offered him Islam. [‘Abd al-Masīḥ] did not accept it from him,²⁴ and [his] response offended [the governor’s] hearing. He became enraged at that, and ordered him to be beheaded. And indeed they carried it out.

In obedience to the governor’s order that ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s body should be kept from the Christians and burned, it was tossed into a deserted well, along with wood that was set alight, and a guard was set over it. The story concludes with the daring recovery of his body by monks from Mt Sinai and some of the young Christian men of al-Ramla, and—after some rather comical and unseemly squabbling—the division of relics between the Church of St Kyriakos in al-Ramla and the monastery of Mt Sinai.

²² *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66v; Griffith, “Account”, p. 368, lines 4–10.

²³ Griffith translated استحي as ‘save your life’ (instead of ‘be ashamed’) and in ‘Abd al-Masīḥ’s reply read حياء as defectively written حياة, ‘life’, rather than as حياء, ‘shame’; Griffith, “Account”, p. 373, lines 29–31. The manuscript text is similarly interpreted in *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn*, p. 296, lines 1–2. However, apart from the unlikelihood of حياة being written without the tā’ marbūta, the motif of shame is prominent in the interrogation of converts in stories of this type. In a recension of the martyrdom of Rawḥ al-Qurashī/Anthony published by Paul Peeters in 1912, a Damascene qāḍī asks Anthony: أما تستحي، يا أخي، أنأتترك دينك الذي عليه ولدت، وجنسك الشريف، وتصير كافراً؟ (My brother, are you not ashamed to desert the religion in which you were born and your noble stock, and become an unbeliever?); P. Peeters, “S. Antoine le néo-martyr”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 31, 1912, [pp. 410–50] p. 447, lines 9–10.

²⁴ The word فما is in the margin and does not show up very clearly in the film. I read it as the negation of قبل, while Griffith saw الله and interpreted قبل as a preposition; Griffith, “Account”, p. 368, line 9 (text) and p. 373, line 34 (translation).

*The Name of the Martyr*²⁵

The protagonist of the story is Qays ibn Rabīʿ ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī, who as a monk took the name ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. There are a few simple points of clarification to be made here.

First, a textual problem in *Sinai Arabic* 542 has caused some confusion. At the very beginning of its account of the martyrdom, the first two names of the martyr are reversed: 'There was a man of the Christians of Najrān called Rabīʿ ibn Qays ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī . . .'.²⁶ Later, however, the monk writes in his letter of provocation as follows: 'I am Qays ibn Rabīʿ ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī'.²⁷ And when his former raiding partner recognizes him, he exclaims: 'Are you not Qays al-Ghassānī?'²⁸ Thus, in two of the three cases where the martyr's given name (*ism*) is mentioned, it is *Qays*. Turning to the copy of the story in *British Library oriental* 5019, we find that it consistently gives the martyr's *ism* as *Qays*.

Second, the *nisba* that is normally used in the story is *al-Ghassānī*. In addition to the three instances of this *nisba* just mentioned, the young man is once identified simply as 'al-Ghassānī' in the course of his dialogue with the priest at Baalbek.²⁹ His second *nisba*, 'al-Najrānī', is added just once, at the end of the monk's very full self-identification in his letter of provocation.

Third, when Qays al-Ghassānī became a monk he was given a new name: *ʿAbd al-Masīḥ*.³⁰ Indeed, this is how the story refers to him as he makes his response to the governor at al-Ramla, who attempts to shame him into reconversion to Islam.³¹

These points indicate that in order to conform to the actual data and usages of the text we should refer to the martyr as Qays al-Ghassānī (the text's own abbreviation of the fuller 'Qays ibn Rabīʿ ibn

²⁵ The following observations are inspired in part by S. K. Samir, "Saint Rawḥ al-Quraṣī: étude d'onomastique arabe et authenticité de sa passion", *Le Muséon* 105, 1992, pp. 343–59.

²⁶ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65r; Griffith, "Account", p. 361, line 4. It is this order of names that is followed by Griffith, "Account", and, following him, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 381–3.

²⁷ See above, p. 111.

²⁸ See above, p. 112.

²⁹ See above, p. 110.

³⁰ The text explicitly states that "ʿAbd al-Masīḥ" was our hero's name '*inda al-ruh-bāniyya* ('upon becoming a monk'); *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66r; Griffith, "Account", p. 366, line 12. See Griffith, "Account", p. 355, followed by Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 382, where it is suggested that he received this name upon becoming superior of the monastery of Mt Sinai.

³¹ See above, pp. 112–3.

Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī'), who as a monk was known as ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. The form of this name used in some recent literature, 'Abd al-Masīḥ al-Najrānī',³² confuses elements of the martyr's secular and monastic names and is best avoided.

These points would be quibbles hardly worth mentioning were it not for the possibility that the distinction between names may play a role in the understanding of certain passages of the text. For example, the reader will recall that when ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's former raiding companion identified him and asked, 'Are you not Qays al-Ghassānī?' the monk replied: 'I do not know what you are saying.'³³ Many first-time hearers of the story are immediately reminded of Peter's denial of Christ recorded in Matthew 26.70: οὐκ οἶδα τί λέγεις. Are we to understand that, in a moment of weakness, the monk resorted to falsehood (quickly unmasked by his accuser's ability to describe a hidden scar)? This is not impossible, although for the monk to speak untruth in a moment of fear seems out of keeping with both his earlier temerity and his later steadfastness. Perhaps a more satisfying interpretation of the exchange can be offered if the Qays/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ distinction is carefully maintained: when he became a monk, 'Qays al-Ghassānī' in effect *died* and was *reborn* as 'Abd al-Masīḥ'. ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's response to his accuser is, indeed, evasive—almost a kind of Christian *taqiyya*. However, the content of the monk's statement can perhaps be understood *not* as a denial of the truth, but rather as denial of a past identity: 'I am not the man you knew.'³⁴

The Text in Literary Context

The corpus of Melkite neo-martyrdoms

One of the most helpful features of Griffith's study of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* is that he located it within the literary context of a corpus of accounts of Melkite neo-martyrs in the Umayyad and early

³² Griffith, "Account", and subsequent articles (see notes 36 and 64 below); Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 381. In contrast, the recent Arabic supplement to the Antiochian synaxaries, *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn*, instinctively understands the logic of the saint's names. It supplies a *troparion* for the saint which begins: 'Qays ibn Najrān [*sic*] al-Ghassānī became, through Christ, when he was granted guidance, a servant of Christ [*ʿabdan li-al-Masīḥ*]'; Biṭār, *Al-qiddīsūn al-mansiyyūn*, p. 299.

³³ See above, p. 112.

³⁴ If this interpretation is correct, it may also shed some light on ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's failed attempt at voluntary martyrdom. By identifying himself in his letter of provocation as 'Qays ibn Rabī' ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī', was the monk claiming for himself an identity that was no longer his? Was it not somehow fitting that God should refuse the offer of martyrdom so improperly provoked?

'Abbasid periods³⁵—a corpus that he has described in considerable detail in a paper recently published in Jerusalem,³⁶ and which may be supplemented by Hoyland's survey of martyrologies.³⁷ The list that follows is not intended to be exhaustive, but may serve to give some idea of the stories that were known in Melkite circles at the time that *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīh* was fresh.³⁸ In rough chronological order these Melkite 'neo-martyrs' up to the later ninth century include:

1. *Michael of Tiberias*:³⁹ monk of Mar Sabas, unjustly imprisoned after he rebuffed the advances of the wife of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65/685–86/705). In a debate with the caliph he refused the latter's invitation to embrace Islam and insisted instead that Muḥammad was a 'deceiver'. Unscathed after ordeal by fire and poison, he was beheaded outside Jerusalem.

2. *Peter of Capitolias*:⁴⁰ a priest of Capitolias, a city of the Decapolis in the Transjordan. He was cruelly executed there for his stubborn refusal to refrain from violent invective against Islam, by order of the caliph al-Walid on 13 January 96/715.

3. *The caliph's cousin*⁴¹ (*Pachomios*):⁴² a convert to Christianity after a eucharistic vision at the church of St George in Diospolis, he became

³⁵ Griffith, "Account", pp. 347–51.

³⁶ S. H. Griffith, "Christians, Muslims, and Neo-Martyrs: saints' lives and Holy Land history", in A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa eds, *Sharing the Sacred: religious contacts and conflicts in the Holy Land, first-fifteenth centuries C.E.*, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 163–207. This important article should be consulted for the martyrdoms of several figures listed below: Michael, Peter, Romanos, Bacchus, Anthony, and 'Abd al-Masīh.

³⁷ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, Chapter 9, "Martyrologies". Hoyland gives consideration to several of the figures listed below: Michael, Peter, Pachomios, Elias, Romanos, 'Abd al-Masīh, and others mentioned in the notes.

³⁸ References to a number of other martyrdom accounts will be found in the notes. I have not included stories of Byzantine prisoners-of-war and (especially) of Christian Arabs who refused conversion despite all threats at the time of the Islamic conquests and in the following decades. For examples, see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 347–51 (the sixty Byzantine martyrs of Gaza) and pp. 352–4 (various Christian Arabs).

³⁹ Paul Peeters, "La passion de S. Michel le Sabaïte", *Analecta Bollandiana* 48, 1930, pp. 65–98 (Latin translation of the Georgian text, and study); S. H. Griffith, "Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik: Christian apologetics and martyrology in the early Islamic period", *Aram* 6, 1994, pp. 115–48 (new study); M. J. Blanchard, "The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery", *Aram* 6, 1994, pp. 149–63 (English translation).

⁴⁰ P. Peeters, "La passion de S. Pierre de Capitolias (†13 janvier 715)", *Analecta Bollandiana* 57, 1939, pp. 299–333 (French summary of the Georgian text and study).

⁴¹ Sahas (see next note) translates ἀνεψιός as 'nephew', but this creates a problem since the protagonist of the story and the caliph are each ἀνεψιός to the other.

⁴² Gregory the Decapolite, *Sermo historicus*, PG 100, cols 1201–12 (Greek text with

a monk of Mount Sinai, then returned to Palestine/Syria in order to make profession of his faith (and to anathematize 'the religion of the Saracens and their false prophet') before his cousin the caliph. He was stoned to death by an angry mob. The story appears to be set in the first half of the second/eighth century.⁴³

4. *Elias*:⁴⁴ a Christian craftsman, born in Baalbek but making his home in Damascus, he was (wrongly) suspected of having renounced his faith at a party at which he had undone his (distinctively Christian) belt. Prudently retiring to Baalbek, after eight years he returned to Damascus where he was denounced as an apostate from Islam and dragged before the local governor. Having refused every opportunity to embrace Islam and regain his freedom, he was eventually executed by order of Muḥammad, the nephew of the caliph al-Mahdī, on 14 February 162/779.

5. *Romanos*:⁴⁵ a Byzantine monk native to Galatia, he was taken prisoner by Muslim raiders in 154/771. After years in captivity (mostly in Baghdad), he was executed for reconverting Byzantine prisoners to Christianity after they had apostatized through fear, by order of the caliph al-Mahdī at al-Raqqā on 1 May 163/780.⁴⁶

6. *Ḍaḥḥāk (Bacchus)*:⁴⁷ a convert to Christianity (his father had converted to Islam while his mother remained secretly attached to the

a Latin translation); English translation in D. J. Sahas, "What an Infidel Saw that a Faithful Did Not: Gregory Dekapolites (d. 842) and Islam", *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31, 1986, pp. 47–67. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 383–6, has examined the two known manuscripts of the work, *Vatican gr. 1130* (similar to the PG text) and *Paris gr. 1190*; according to the latter, the convert's name after his baptism was Joachim.

⁴³ Pachomios-Joachim does not appear to be known in the Melkite synaxaries, but I include him anyway because of the many shared features between his story and those of the other converts in the list.

⁴⁴ The text may be found in A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, "Syllogē palaistinēs kai syriakēs hagiologias", *Pravoslavnyj Palestinskij Sbornik* 19, 1907, pp. 42–59. See the summary in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 363–5.

⁴⁵ P. Peeters, "S. Romain le néomartyr (†1 mai 780) d'après un document géorgien", *Analecta Bollandiana* 30, 1911, pp. 393–427 (Latin translation of the Georgian text and study).

⁴⁶ Although Romanos was a Byzantine rather than a Melkite, he was 'adopted' into the Melkite martyr-lists, and his story probably circulated in Arabic, from whence it was translated into Georgian. Another story involving the misadventures of Byzantine Christians within the *Dār al-Islām* is the Greek narrative of a large group of pilgrims (of Iconium?) to Jerusalem, apprehended outside the city upon the expiration of the truce of 99/717–106/724. Given the choice of accepting Islam or execution, sixty fearlessly confessed their Christian faith and were crucified and shot by archers; see Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 360–3.

⁴⁷ Preserved in two manuscripts, *Paris gr. 1180* (10th c.) and *1553* (14th c.), the full *vita* of Bacchus has been printed in a volume now exceedingly rare: F. F. Combefis, *Christi martyrum lecta trias; Hyacinthus Amastrensis, Bacchus et Elias Novi Martyres Agarenico*

Christian faith), he became a monk of Mar Sabas. After converting five of his brothers to Christianity he was executed in Jerusalem under the governor Harthama (170/786–7).

7. *Rawḥ al-Qurashī* (Anthony):⁴⁸ a convert to Christianity following an icon miracle and a Eucharistic vision at the church of St Theodore at Nayrab (Damascus), he visited Jerusalem and the monasteries of the Jordan Valley, was baptized in the Jordan, and then returned to his folk in the garb of a monk. Immediately arrested, he was sent to al-Raqqā on the Euphrates, where he appeared before Harthama and eventually before the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd, by whose order he was beheaded on 25 December 799 (183).

8. *George of Bethlehem*:⁴⁹ a monk of Mar Sabas, he entered Western ecclesiastical history as one of the martyrs of Córdoba. He was executed for his violent invective against Islam (along with Aurelius and Sabigotho, Felix and Liliōsa, executed for apostasy) under the emir ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II on 27 July 852 (238).⁵⁰

9. *Qays al-Ghassānī* (‘Abd al-Masīḥ), the subject of the present study, who was executed in al-Ramla for apostasy on the orders of the local governor, perhaps just after 245/860 (if we accept Griffith’s arguments regarding the dating of the story).

These martyrdoms are preserved in a variety of languages: Greek (the caliph’s cousin/Pachomios, Elias, Ḍaḥḥāk/Bacchus), Georgian (Michael, Peter, Romanos), Latin (George), and Arabic (Rawḥ/Anthony, Qays/‘Abd al-Masīḥ). They were known to varying extents, several

pridem mucrone sublati, Paris, 1666, pp. 61–126. More accessible are the précis from a Greek *menologion* in *PG* 117, cols 211–4, and the study of P. Ap. Dēmētrakopoulou, “Hagios Bakchos o Neos”, in *Epistēmōnikē Epetēris tēs Philosophikēs Scholēs tou Panepistēmiou Athēnōn* 26, 1979, pp. 331–62.

⁴⁸ P. Peeters, “St Antoine le néo-martyr”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 31, 1912, pp. 410–50; *idem*, “L’autobiographie de S. Antoine le néo-martyr”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 33, 1914, pp. 52–63 (summary of another recension of the story); I. Dick, “La passion arabe de S. Antoine Ruwāḥ, néo-martyr de Damas (†25 déc. 799)”, *Le Muséon* 74, 1961, pp. 109–33 (edition and French translation of the oldest Arabic text of the martyrdom); see also Samir’s important study mentioned in note 25 above.

⁴⁹ Eulogius of Toledo, *Memoriale sanctorum* (in *PL* 115, cols 731–813); the story of George is found at 2.10 (cols 777–92). See K. B. Wolf, *Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain*, Cambridge, 1988; and B. Z. Kedar, “Latin in Ninth-Century Mar Sabas?”, *Byzantion* 65, 1995, pp. 252–4.

⁵⁰ George may seem out of place in this list, since the story of his martyrdom was not known in the Christian East. However, the account of his martyrdom is very revealing of the attitudes of a third/ninth-century Melkite monk from Mar Sabas. If we accept with Griffith, “Account”, that ‘Abd al-Masīḥ was a historical figure of the third/ninth century, then he and George were contemporaries who both had Mar Sabas connections.

appearing in the tenth-century synaxary preserved in *Sinai Georgian 34* and published by Garitte,⁵¹ and some in the Greek Melkite synaxaries of the eleventh to seventeenth centuries surveyed by Sauget.⁵² They range widely in historical reliability: while in the story of George of Bethlehem we are on firm historical ground,⁵³ in the story of Michael we are probably dealing with an apologetic fiction.⁵⁴ The other accounts fall somewhere in between.

Despite these differences, the stories listed above do form a rather well defined set, with features that are repeated from story to story. The settings repeat themselves: Mt Sinai, Mar Sabas, Jerusalem, al-Ramla, Baalbek, Damascus, al-Raqqa. Again and again the martyrs appear before the highest officials in the caliphate. The offences that call for capital punishment are quickly listed: invective against Islam; conversion from Islam; making converts from Islam. And as we read the stories we notice stereotypical elements in the final confrontation between the Christian confessor and the Muslim official: the Muslim official's reluctance to pass capital sentence, the martyr's obstinacy ('Do what you like!'), the offer of (re-) conversion to Islam, the martyr's final confession and/or provocation.⁵⁵

Additional common elements come into focus when we consider four stories that have to do with converts from Islam: the caliph's cousin who became the monk Pachomios; Ḍaḥḥāk who became the monk Bacchus; Rawḥ who was baptized as Anthony; and Qays who became the monk ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. The caliph's cousin and Rawḥ were vouchsafed eucharistic visions.⁵⁶ The caliph's cousin and Qays had emotional conversations with priests.⁵⁷ The caliph's cousin, Rawḥ and Qays all visited the patriarch in Jerusalem.⁵⁸ The caliph's cousin and Rawḥ both

⁵¹ See G. Garitte ed. and trans., *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34, X^e siècle* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 30), Brussels, 1958, where Peter, Eliás, Romanos, Bacchus, and Anthony are mentioned.

⁵² See J.-M. Sauget, *Premières recherches sur l'origine et les caractéristiques des synaxaires melkites (XI^e-XVII^e siècles)* (*Subsidia Hagiographica* 45), Brussels, 1969, where Michael, Romanos, Anthony, and ʿAbd al-Masīḥ are listed.

⁵³ Eulogius of Toledo was an eye-witness of and participant in the events he recorded.

⁵⁴ See Peeters, "S. Michel", pp. 91-8. Griffith, "Michael", pp. 145-8, thinks it likely that there was a monk named Michael at Mar Sabas in the Umayyad period, who perhaps a century later was still remembered with honour and deemed a fitting hero for a work of hagiography.

⁵⁵ All of these elements are found in the story of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. See pp. 112-3 above.

⁵⁶ The caliph's cousin/Pachomios: *Sermo historicus*, iv-vi (PG 100, cols 1201-4). Rawḥ/Anthony: Dick, "Passion", pp. 120-1 (nos 2-3).

⁵⁷ The caliph's cousin/Pachomios: *Sermo historicus*, vii-xvi (PG 100 cols 1203-6). Qays/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ: Griffith, "Account", pp. 362-4 (and see above).

⁵⁸ Rawḥ/Anthony: Dick, "Passion", pp. 122-3 (nos 5-6). Qays/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ: Griffith, "Account", p. 364.

had their first requests for baptism refused, for reasons of prudence, while ʿAḥḥāk was sent away from Mar Sabas for fear that his presence after his baptism there could bring harm to the monastery.⁵⁹ Both Rawḥ and Qays expressed their regret at having participated in the wars against the Christian Byzantines.⁶⁰

These lists of similarities could be extended. The point here is not to perform a comparative analysis of this set of martyrdom accounts, but rather to establish a context in which the story of Qays al-Ghassānī/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ can be re-read.

Reading the text as a work of edification

How, then, shall we read this text?

Hagiographical texts may, of course, be read and studied in a variety of ways, for a variety of purposes. The focus of study may be the principal character—the saint himself or herself—with a view to ascertaining what may or may not be affirmed with confidence about the saint as a historical figure. ‘Did this person really exist?’ or ‘Does the narrative have a historical kernel underneath the layers of legendary accretions?’ are frequently asked questions.⁶¹ In contrast to this, there has been a fair amount of interest recently in sifting hagiographical texts for material of relevance to the social historian—what has been called the ‘Cuisinart method’ of studying hagiographical texts.⁶² Following this, the focus of interest is not the story’s protagonist (who may or may not have in fact existed), but the incidental details of social, political, economic and religious life to which the story bears indirect witness.⁶³

According to the recension of the story of the caliph’s cousin preserved in *Paris gr. 1190*, he too visited the patriarch in Jerusalem; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 384 (nb note 143).

⁵⁹ The caliph’s cousin/Pachomios: *Sermo historicus*, xv (PG 100, cols 1205–6). Rawḥ/Anthony: Dick, “Passion”, p. 123 (no. 6). ʿAḥḥāk/Bacchus: PG 117, cols 213–4 (no. 38).

⁶⁰ Rawḥ/Anthony: Dick, “Passion”, p. 126 (no. 11). Qays/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ: Griffith, “Account”, p. 363.

⁶¹ Underlying such questions for many students of hagiographical texts has been the concern ‘not to profane the cult of saints by doing honour to apocryphal persons’, in the words of Evelyne Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History”, in S. Wilson ed., *Saints and their Cults: studies in religious sociology, folklore and history*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 101. For the historical methodology of the Bollandists, see F. van Ommeslaigh, “The *Acta Sanctorum* and Bollandist Methodology”, in S. Hackel ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, San Bernardino, CA, 1980, pp. 155–63.

⁶² Leslie MacCoul approvingly borrows this term from a lecture by Ihor Ševčenko in 1991; see L. S. B. MacCoul, “Notes on Some Coptic Hagiographical Texts”, *Proche-Orient Chrétien* 42, 1992, pp. 11–18.

⁶³ See Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine Hagiography”, pp. 101–21, for an attempt,

However, these saints' lives and martyrdoms were *not* composed—and then copied, preserved, and elaborated upon—in order to provide later generations with data establishing the historicity of particular individuals or to offer raw material for the social historian's Cuisinart. They were composed—and copied, preserved, and elaborated upon—by Christians, usually monks, in order to *edify* other members of the Christian community: their fellow monks, visitors to their monasteries, pastors and their congregations. Let us, then, attempt a reading of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* in which we for the moment lay aside questions of 'authenticity', turn the Cuisinart down low or off altogether, and hearken to the account as an artistically-written narrative that possesses a certain integrity and that intends to edify its readers and hearers. Having listened carefully, we may ask: what precisely does the text intend, and how does it go about its work? I suggest that there are at least three areas in which *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* artfully attempts to encourage, teach, and persuade its Melkite Christian audience.

1. To mark off and shore up the community

That the accounts of the Melkite neo-martyrs are intent upon the edification of the Christian community has not been lost upon students of these texts. For example, Griffith notes the centrality of their theme of conversion, and comments as follows:

Clearly these narratives, whatever other purposes they may have served, functioned in a literary way to demarcate the considerable difference between Christians and Muslims in Islamic society, and they reinforced it in the Christian religious imagination.⁶⁴

That is, one function of these texts in the lives of their Christian readers and hearers was to make plain the difference between Christianity and Islam. The account of Qays al-Ghassānī is an excellent case in point. Its narrator is by no means reticent about what narrative critics term his 'evaluative point of view'. The young Qays is described as an exemplary Christian; it is only through 'ignorance, youth, and evil company' that he came to join his Muslim friends in 'trampling every taboo'.⁶⁵ Later in the story, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's monastic companions are described as 'virtuous' (*fāḍilīn*);⁶⁶ the Muslim who denounced

using anthropologically informed structural analysis, 'to highlight a structure in which social history can find [in hagiographical texts] a justifiable and solid source of information instead of a heap of interesting but fortuitous details' (p. 112).

⁶⁴ S. H. Griffith, "The View of Islam from the Monasteries of Palestine in the Early ʿAbbāsid Period: Theodore Abū Qurrah and the *Summa Theologiae Arabica*", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, 1996, p. 22.

⁶⁵ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65r; Griffith, "Account", p. 361, line 4–p. 362, line 9.

⁶⁶ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65v; Griffith, "Account", p. 365, line 6.

him to the governor, however, is 'accursed' (*maʿlūn*).⁶⁷ And so on. There is not much nuance in the narrator's favourable evaluation of the story's Christian characters on the one hand, and his harsh evaluation of its Muslim characters on the other.⁶⁸

Plainly, the account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ's martyrdom intends to strengthen the community of its Christian readers and hearers by drawing a clear line of demarcation between it and the community of Muslims; *like-wise*, it encourages those readers to persevere unmoved on the *Christian* side of that line, come what may.⁶⁹ *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ* is unique in the corpus in that, as a story of a conversion to Islam *and* of a re-conversion to Christianity, it offers us both negative and positive examples from a single life. The young Qays deserted the faith of his community for what the narrator gives the reader to understand are less than rationally compelling reasons ('ignorance, youth, and evil company'), and then the narrator portrays him as 'coming to his senses', as it were, and ruing his decision. Later, however, the reader learns how the mature monk 'Abd al-Masīḥ *refused* to desert his faith, even though his refusal cost him his life. Readers and hearers of the story are invited to identify with its hero, and thereby strengthen their resolve to cling to the faith of their ancestors, whatever the pressures or temptations to abandon that faith might be.

2. To hold open the door of repentance

The points made above are quite obvious, and are by no means unique to *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ*: *every* martyrdom-account intends to draw a clear dividing-line between the Christian community and that which lies outside, *and* to renew Christians' courage in identifying with that community. So far we have presented little about 'Abd al-Masīḥ that cannot likewise be affirmed of all the other texts of the corpus of the Melkite neo-martyrs.

However, *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ* does have its own peculiar features. One way to bring these features into view is by asking: What do we *not* find in this text? What is 'missing'?

⁶⁷ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 66v; Griffith, "Account", p. 368, line 1.

⁶⁸ Similarly, Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 351, notes how the (Latin) account of the martyrdom of the Byzantine garrison at Gaza labels the Muslim commander 'Amr as 'impious', 'devil', 'hateful to God' and 'most cruel', and the Arabs themselves as 'impious' and 'godless'.

⁶⁹ 'The purpose of these works was twofold: to provide role models and heroes to further the fight against apostasy, and to serve as anti-Muslim propaganda'; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, p. 347.

In the first place, *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* is extremely sparing in its report of the final dialogue between the martyr and the Muslim official. One dramatic exchange is recorded:

The governor said to him, 'Be ashamed of yourself! For you are a man of high birth and dignity!'

ʿAbd al-Masīḥ replied, 'Shame from Christ my God is more compelling than shame from you! Do what you like.'⁷⁰

After that exchange, however, all we hear is as follows:

After that [the governor] brought him out and offered him Islam. [ʿAbd al-Masīḥ] did not accept it from him, and [his] response offended [the governor's] hearing.⁷¹

What was the offence-giving response? We are not told! This is in marked contrast to other accounts in our corpus, where at this point in the narrative we frequently find a rather highly-developed polemical statement or dialogue.⁷² The emphasis in *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* is *not* on an explicit anti-Islamic polemic, but on something else.

There *is* a rather highly developed dialogue in our text: not the one between the martyr and the Muslim official, but rather the dialogue that ensued when Qays, who had been a Muslim *ghāzī* for thirteen years, heard a priest read words of the Gospel on which he had been brought up and was surprised by remorse. The dialogue is extremely moving, at least to Christian ears. The priest gives gentle evangelical counsel to the young man, which we might summarize as: 'The door of repentance is open. Re-conversion to Christianity is possible. That which humans cannot endure is easy for God.'⁷³

This reader senses that the writer here intends more than mere biography or historical reporting. In Syria/Palestine in the third/ninth century—very plausibly the setting for the story and perhaps of its author as well—conversion from Christianity to Islam was not uncommon, and the rate of conversion was in all likelihood accelerating.⁷⁴ The vast

⁷⁰ See above, pp. 112–3.

⁷¹ See above, p. 113.

⁷² For example, Rawḥ/Anthony makes a ringing defence of his Christian faith, and after capital sentence is passed does not hesitate to inform Hārūn al-Rashīd of the three 'sins' for which his beheading alone will atone: performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, making sacrifice on the ʿId al-Adḥā, and participating in the wars against the Christian Byzantines; Dick, "Passion", pp. 125–6 (nos 10–11). For the dialogue that is the chief feature of the account of the martyrdom of Michael of Mar Sabas, and its relationship to other texts, see Griffith, "Michael", pp. 137–45.

⁷³ *Sinai Arabic* 542, f. 65r-v; Griffith, "Account", p. 362, line 9–p. 364, line 7.

⁷⁴ For some reflections on conversion to Islam in Syria, see R. W. Bulliet, *Conversion*

majority of these conversions were, without a doubt, undertaken with a free will, although Christian sources do recall rare instances of forced conversion.⁷⁵ Whether or not such reports are credible, it does not strain the imagination to suppose that there were cases of Christians converting to Islam out of less than perfect conviction, and later regretting their decision. Anastasius of Sinai (d. c. 700) tells the story of George the Black, who abandoned the Christian faith after being enslaved as a child but re-embraced it at the age of eighteen, was denounced by one of his fellow-slaves, and was put to death by his Muslim master.⁷⁶ Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) mentions the case of one Cyrus, put to death in 152/769 for having re-converted to Christianity.⁷⁷ And in the third/ninth century, but from distant al-Andalus, we hear of a number of Christians who had converted to Islam but later reconverted to Christianity among the martyrs of Córdoba. These included one Felix, who was executed along with George of Mar Sabas.⁷⁸

The case of penitents seeking re-admission to the Church after apostatising had been, to be sure, a major source of controversy in the early Church, which had to deal with the issue in the wake of Roman persecutions. If a pastorally flexible attitude towards penitent apostates had (barely) prevailed in the pre-Constantinian church, an attitude of openness to 'returning' Christians could only have been more difficult in the church within the *Dār al-Islām* because of fear of sanctions from the Muslim authorities. We need only recall the reluctance of highly placed Christians in several of our corpus of martyrdom texts to baptize or to become too closely associated with converts. The reason for this is made explicit in the story of the caliph's cousin. When he asked a priest of the Church of St George for baptism, the priest responded:

to Islam in the Medieval Period: an essay in quantitative history, Cambridge MA, 1979, pp. 104–13. Also see the comments of Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 336–43, and Griffith, 'View of Islam', p. 22.

⁷⁵ See the martyrdom accounts mentioned in notes 38 and 46 above. For another example, the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Michael, writing in the twelfth century but using older sources, reports that in the year 173/789 the caliph al-Mahdī visited Aleppo where he was enraged by the spectacle of richly-dressed Christians riding Arab horses. Through torture 5,000 men converted, while one, named Layth, was martyred. J. B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d'Antioche (1166–99)*, 4 vols, Paris, 1899–1910; here vol. IV, pp. 478–9 (text) and vol. III, pp. 1–3 (French translation).

⁷⁶ The story is summarized in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 351–2. B. Flusin and P. Pattenden are preparing an edition from *Vatican gr. 2592*.

⁷⁷ Chabot, *Chronique*, vol. II, p. 527.

⁷⁸ Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum* 2.10 (PL 115, cols 777–92); on Felix's background see 2.10.4 (col. 778). See also the English summary in Wolf, *Christian Martyrs*, pp. 27–9.

‘God forbid! I cannot perform such a work, for if I do so, and if your cousin the *amūr al-muʿminīn* learns of it, he will kill me and destroy the church.’⁷⁹ If there was a debate in the third/ninth-century Melkite church about what to do with ‘returning’ Christians, questions of prudence would have played an important role, along with theological and pastoral considerations.⁸⁰

Assuming that such a debate took place, the author of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* had a clear contribution to make to it: ‘God rejoices more in the return of one sinner than in a hundred righteous.’ The one ‘returning’ from Islam could be re-accepted into the church through repentance, a covenant with God not to return to his former way of life, and a rite of absolution (*uṣmūn* = ὁμολογία⁸¹)⁸¹ for the forgiveness of sins.⁸² Such a convert could turn out to be an exemplary monk, the superior of a monastery, and a martyr for the faith.

3. To instil a right understanding of martyrdom

In *British Library or. 5019*, the story of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ’s martyrdom is immediately preceded by another martyrdom account on our list, that of Rawḥ al-Qurashī, known as Anthony after his baptism.⁸³ If we read the two stories in the manuscript’s order and then ask what is ‘missing’ from *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ*, an immediate response might well be: *visions and miracles*. According to *The Martyrdom of Anthony*, Rawḥ was wounded in the hand after he had shot an arrow at the icon of St Theodore, and through the power of the saint the arrow doubled back.⁸⁴ Later, Rawḥ had a vision of a lamb being divided as the eucharist was celebrated at the saint’s church.⁸⁵ That night, Rawḥ was confronted by the saint himself.⁸⁶ Just before his baptism, the Virgin Mary appeared to him.⁸⁷ After his arrest and imprisonment, light filled

⁷⁹ *Sermo historicus*, xv (PG 100, cols 1205–6).

⁸⁰ The issue of returning apostates had already been explicitly addressed by the West Syrian author Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), who advocated a lenient policy: apostates who repented on their deathbeds could be given the eucharist; returning apostates would be accepted after prayer and a period of penance, and were not to be rebaptized. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, pp. 162–3.

⁸¹ Unfortunately the text tells us nothing about the content of this rite. See Griffith’s suggestions about its nature in Griffith, “Account”, pp. 371–2 (note 4).

⁸² Griffith, “Account”, p. 364, lines 4–7. It is interesting that *no* period of penance seems to have been imposed before Qays was readmitted to the eucharist.

⁸³ *British Library or. 5019*, ff. 100r–103v. *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* follows in ff. 103v–105v.

⁸⁴ Dick, “Passion”, p. 120 (no. 2).

⁸⁵ Dick, “Passion”, pp. 120–1 (nos 2–3).

⁸⁶ Dick, “Passion”, p. 122 (no. 4).

⁸⁷ Dick, “Passion”, p. 123 (no. 6).

the dungeon in which he was being held, and a voice promised him the crown of martyrdom.⁸⁸ And finally he was granted a vision of two elders, one of whom held lamps that burned without water or oil, while the other placed a crown on his head.⁸⁹

In stark contrast to all of this, in Griffith's words,

[t]he account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ an-Nağrānī is simple and straightforward. There are in it none of the fantastic elements which invite the skepticism of the critical scholar and set him in search of another agenda on the part of the writer, beyond the bound of edifying biography.⁹⁰

Precisely *because* the text is in general so sober, we need to pay especial attention to the one episode in the text in which the miraculous does play an important role: that is, the account of 'Abd al-Masīḥ's miraculously frustrated attempt to provoke his own martyrdom.⁹¹ Assuming once again that we are not dealing with 'mere biography' but rather with an artistically written work of edification, what may be said about this episode?

In the first place, viewed against the background of the other martyrdoms we have mentioned, there is nothing strange about 'Abd al-Masīḥ's desire to 'make his affair known'. After Rawḥ was baptized in the Jordan, given the name Anthony, and dressed in the *skhēma* of a monk, he *immediately* returned to his family in Damascus, who, after failing to convince him to return to his senses, delivered him to the *qādī*. The *qādī* then set in motion the proceedings that eventually led to his execution.⁹² The same motif of return to one's kin is combined with that of invective preaching against Islam in the story of the caliph's cousin who became Pachomios of Mt Sinai. Having conceived a desire to 'see Christ', he returned to the Church of St George where he had been granted the vision that convinced him of the truth of Christianity. There the priest advised him: 'Go to your cousin, and preach Christ; and blaspheme and anathematize the faith of the Saracens and Muḥammad their false prophet.' By fearlessly preaching thus, the priest assured him, he *would* see Christ!⁹³

It was not only the Muslim converts to Christianity who sought martyrdom. The story of Peter of Capitolias is the account of his insistent,

⁸⁸ Dick, "Passion", pp. 124–5 (no. 9).

⁸⁹ Dick, "Passion", p. 125 (no. 9).

⁹⁰ Griffith, "Account", p. 351.

⁹¹ Griffith, "Account", p. 365, line 6–p. 366, line 9 (and see above). The only other miraculous element in the story is the (stereotypical) report that the martyr's remains had not been consumed by fire; Griffith, "Account", p. 369, line 9.

⁹² Dick, "Passion", p. 124 (nos 7–8).

⁹³ *Sermo historicus*, xx (PG 100, cols 1207–8).

rather bizarre, but ultimately successful bid to become a martyr through violent preaching against Islam.⁹⁴ That of Michael of Mar Sabas involves a debate between him and the caliph, in which Michael does not hesitate to affirm: 'Muḥammad is neither an apostle nor a prophet, but a deceiver.'⁹⁵ And if there may be doubt about the historicity of these accounts, there can be little about the impassioned outbursts of George of Bethlehem at the court of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II in Córdoba.⁹⁶

Seen in the context of these other stories, there is nothing very unusual about ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's decision to make a public profession of his Christianity in the provincial capital al-Ramla, in order to provoke his execution. What is unusual about the story of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ is that he *failed*—and failed because God miraculously prevented his arrest. As ʿAbd al-Masīḥ's companions pointed out to him, God did not (yet) will his martyrdom—and God's will was not to be resisted.

What should be made of this? It is possible, of course, that this episode is an historical reminiscence of a failed attempt at provoking martyrdom that has been embroidered in such a way as to be entertaining and edifying. But even if this were the case, and there did exist the ever-sought 'kernel of historic truth' behind the episode, what is the *edifying* point? What moral is being pointed here?

It would be an exaggeration to use a word like 'polemic', but perhaps it is not too much to discern in this episode a gentle critique of the theology of martyrdom that emerges from the majority of the Melkite martyr accounts we have taken into consideration. Like a number of others whose stories were told and whose feast days were celebrated, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ sought martyrdom on his own account. As events made plain, however, his personal quest for martyrdom did not conform to the will of God.

Years later, of course, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ did receive the crown of martyrdom. This time, however, he had not himself reached for it. In fact, he had made one attempt to avoid it, giving an evasive response to the initial accusation of his former comrade in arms. But once it was clear that confession and martyrdom were to be his lot, ʿAbd al-Masīḥ did not flinch. He refused the escape that would have left his companions in danger in his stead, confessed Christ before the governor, declined the offer of conversion to Islam and freedom, and went to his death.

⁹⁴ See note 40 above. In the story the Muslim authorities repeatedly give Peter the opportunity to avoid punishment, a point stressed by B. Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European approaches toward the Muslims*, Princeton NJ, 1984, pp. 14–15.

⁹⁵ Peeters, "S. Michel", p. 71 (no. 8); Blanchard, "Georgian Version", p. 153 (no. 8).

⁹⁶ Eulogius, *Memoriale sanctorum* 2.10.30, 33 (PL 115, cols 790–1).

The story of Qays al-Ghassānī/ʿAbd al-Masīḥ presents a very clear conception of martyrdom, and one at odds with a piety that could exult in the provocations of, for example, a Peter of Capitolas. The writer of the story would have us know that God may indeed call a believer to martyrdom, as he called ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. If so, one is to respond like him, refusing the escape that would put others in harm's way and bravely confessing the faith to the end. However, martyrdom is *not* to be sought or provoked; *that* is an act of *hubris*, taking into one's own hands what properly belongs to God.

Of course, a host of parallels immediately leap to mind. The phenomenon of voluntary martyrdom in Córdoba divided the Christians there between those who saw in it a selfish, community-imperilling act of pride and those, like Eulogius of Toledo, who saw in it a noble witness to the truth.⁹⁷ The same tensions were a constant feature of the pre-Constantinian church. Already in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers we find, on the one hand, St Ignatius of Antioch, who longed for his body to be 'ground by the teeth of the wild beasts' so that he 'might prove to be pure bread [of Christ]';⁹⁸ and, on the other, St Polycarp of Smyrna, who initially allowed himself to be persuaded to flee from those who sought his arrest.⁹⁹ It is, in fact, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* that we read one of the first sharp critiques of voluntary martyrdom:

There was a Phrygian named Quintus who had only recently come from Phrygia, and when he saw the wild animals he turned cowardly. Now he was the one who had given himself up and had forced some others to give themselves up voluntarily. With him the governor used many arguments and persuaded him to swear by the gods and offer sacrifice. This is the reason, brothers, that we do not approve of those who come forward of themselves: this is not the teaching of the Gospel.¹⁰⁰

Such contrasts may be multiplied: St Clement of Alexandria with Tertullian, St Cyprian of Carthage with the Novatianists at the time of the Decian persecution, or St Peter of Alexandria with the Melitians

⁹⁷ K. B. Wolf's study of Eulogius of Toledo and his apology for the martyrs of Córdoba (Wolf, *Christian Martyrs*, pp. 51–104) explores the 'mixed sentiments of the Cordoban Christian community' (p. 86). On the 'Council of Córdoba' see p. 59; and also J. Waltz, 'The Significance of the Voluntary Martyrs of Ninth-Century Córdoba', *The Muslim World* 60, 1970, pp. 226–7.

⁹⁸ *Epistle to the Romans* 4.1; translation of M. W. Holmes ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, updated edition, Grand Rapids MI, 1999, p. 171.

⁹⁹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5–6; see H. Musurillo ed. and trans., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford, 1972, pp. 4–7.

¹⁰⁰ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 4; translation of Musurillo, *Acts*, p. 5. For a thorough study of this passage see G. Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp (Kommentar zu den Apostolischen Vätern 6)*, Göttingen, 1998, pp. 119–29.

during the Great Persecution.¹⁰¹ Again and again we are reminded that “[m]artyrdom and apostasy were among the most divisive issues of the ante-Nicene Church.”¹⁰² So these issues were not new in the third/ninth century. The author of *The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ* stood in an ancient tradition that would allow flight from persecution and that suspected the so-called ‘spontaneous martyrs’ of immature spirituality and exhibitionist pride. What is striking is the presence of this witness in a corpus in which the spontaneous martyr is so frequently glorified.

Conclusion

The Martyrdom of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ is not ‘just another’ martyrdom account that preaches ‘the usual’ lessons about courageous confession of the faith. Rather, it has its own emphases and peculiar features. Its account of Qays’ conversion, so beautiful to Christian ears, emphasizes the possibility of return for penitent apostates. And in the paragraphs that follow, between the scene of Qays’ conversion and that of the monk ʿAbd al-Masīḥ’s confession before the governor, there are surprising twists and turns in the plot: ʿAbd al-Masīḥ’s divinely frustrated attempt to provoke his own martyrdom; later, his attempt to evade recognition and arrest; again, his refusal to flee if that would leave his companions in the lurch. By following these twists and turns, the empathetic reader or hearer is led to an understanding of martyrdom that, while not unusual in the history of the Church as a whole, is certainly unusual in a literature that can celebrate the likes of Peter of Capitolias.

¹⁰¹ For all these contrasts, see the very helpful study of W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: a study of a conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus*, New York, 1967.

¹⁰² T. Vivian, *St Peter of Alexandria: Bishop and Martyr*, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 141. See the whole of Chapter 3, “The Canonical Letter”, for the issues under discussion here.

IBN BUṬLĀN IN *BILĀD AL-SHĀM*:
THE CAREER OF A TRAVELLING CHRISTIAN PHYSICIAN

Lawrence Conrad

It is very well known that in the medieval Middle East non-Muslims played a major role in the medical profession. Our sources routinely refer to aspects of this phenomenon, and at times medieval observers comment on what amounted to a Christian and Jewish domination of the field, as one finds, for example, in a rather overstated view of things in the *ḥisba* manual of Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (d. 729/1329):

The provision of medical care is a duty collectively incumbent upon the Islamic community, yet [individually] Muslims do not undertake to fulfil it. In many a town there are no physicians other than those from the *ahl al-dhimma*, whose testimony cannot even be accepted in legal cases involving medicine. One finds no [Muslim] engaged in medical practice; instead they flock to the study of *fiqh*, and especially to matters involving disputes and controversies, filling the town with jurists pronouncing *fatwās* and responding to queries concerning legal cases. But surely there can be no reason for the faith to permit one communal duty to be fulfilled by throngs while another is entirely neglected, aside from the consideration that the physician's profession does not afford him easy access to judgeships or government positions, to precedence over his peers, or to authority over his enemies. How outrageous it is that knowledge of matters of religion should be extinguished in such a manner! Let us seek God's assistance and succour, that He might protect us from such vanities, which anger the Merciful and bring laughter to Satan.¹

The documents of the Cairo Geniza provide a wealth of important detailed information on medicine among the Jewish communities in Egypt and elsewhere, and by extension in society at large.² But in most cases our information is not sufficiently varied, detailed and reliable to

¹ Ibn al-Ukhuwwa, *Maʿālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*, ed. Muḥammad Maḥmūd Shaʿbān and Ṣiddīq Aḥmad ʿĪsā al-Muṭṭī, Cairo, 1976, p. 254.

² See, for example, S. D. F. Goitein, "The Medical Profession" and "Druggists and Pharmacists", in his *A Mediterranean Society: the Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. II, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, pp. 240–72. The important Geniza medical materials at Cambridge have recently been catalogued in H. D. Isaacs, *Medical and Para-Medical Manuscripts in the Cambridge Geniza Collections*, Cambridge, 1994.

allow us to assess the career of an individual doctor from among the *ahl al-kitāb* and address questions dealing with such matters as the perception of the non-Muslim physician in society, his professional aspirations, prospects and interactions, or his sense of identity as an individual and as a scholar. Medical authors could be quite prolific, of course, but the sharply focused scientific thrust of their works often left little or no room for comments that might enlighten us on broader aspects of their careers.³

From the ranks of Christian Arab physicians a major exception to this situation is posed by the career of Ibn Buṭlān,⁴ who left his native Baghdad as a young man and spent the rest of his life travelling, studying, writing, practising medicine, and entangling himself in disputes and difficulties in Syria, Egypt, Asia Minor and Constantinople. His personality and the controversies in which he became involved drew him to the attention of numerous contemporary and later observers, and his own writings are often very informative about him. Of particular importance is the series of polemical open epistles exchanged between himself and 'Alī ibn Riḍwān (d. c. 453/1061) in Cairo.⁵ As I have tried to show elsewhere, these essays bear vital testimony to the dynamics of professional politics in learned circles in the medieval Islamic world.⁶ Also significant in this respect is Ibn Buṭlān's *Dā'wat al-aṭibbā'*, ('The Physicians' Dinner Party'), a largely autobiographical tale about a young man who travels from Baghdad to a distant city in search of career opportunities and suffers at the hands of the town's incompetent and self-serving medical establishment.⁷

³ Hence the very great importance of the genre of medical case notes, the potential of which was first signaled by M. Meyerhof in his "Thirty-Three Clinical Observations by Rhazes (circa 900 AD)", *Isis* 23, 1935, pp. 321–56. More recently, this material is being exploited in major contributions by C. Álvarez Millán. See her edition and translation, with an important introduction, of Abū al-'Alā' Zuhri (d. 525/1130), *Kitāb al-mujarrabāt* (Libro de la experiencias médicas), Madrid, 1994; and her "Graeco-Roman Case Histories and their Influence on Medieval Islamic Clinical Accounts", *Social History of Medicine* 12, 1999, pp. 19–43.

⁴ A good starting point for research on this personality is F. Sezgin, ed., *'Alī ibn Riḍwān (d. c. 453/1061) and al-Mukhtār ibn Buṭlān (d. 458/1066): Texts and Studies*, Frankfurt am Main, 1996. Important surveys of his life and career are available in *GCAL*, II, pp. 191–5; J. Schacht, "Ibn Buṭlān", in *ET*, vol. III, Leiden, 1971, pp. 740b–742a.

⁵ J. Schacht and M. Meyerhof, eds and trans, *The Medico-Philosophical Controversy between Ibn Buṭlān of Baghdad and Ibn Riḍwān of Cairo: a contribution to the history of Greek learning among the Arabs*, Cairo, 1937.

⁶ L. I. Conrad, "Scholarship and Social Context: a medical case from the eleventh-century Near East", in D. Bates, ed., *Knowledge and the Scholarly Medical Traditions*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 84–100. On the broader issues cf. also M. Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350*, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 69–90.

⁷ Ibn Buṭlān, *Dā'wat al-aṭibbā'* (*The Physicians' Dinner Party*), ed. F. Klein-Franke,

Our author offers many further useful comments and insights in his other books, but much more precious material is to hand thanks to his view that his *rihla* from Baghdad was a valuable opportunity to contribute potentially useful material for historical research by others. He thus sent periodic missives back to Baghdad to the scholar and secretary Hilāl al-Šābiʿ (d. 448/1056) to dispose of as he wished. Eventually these missives were used by Hilāl's son Muḥammad, better known as Ghars al-Niʿma al-Šābiʿ (d. 480/1088),⁸ who quoted them *in extenso* in his now lost *Kūtāb al-rabīʿ*,⁹ from this source they became available to the geographer Yāqūt (d. 626/1229)⁹ and the medical biographer al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248).¹⁰ The historian Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. 660/1262) also used Ghars al-Niʿma's *Kūtāb al-rabīʿ*, and from his comments it emerges that he had access to the autograph manuscript of the book, which in turn took material from the original copy of Ibn Buṭlān's missives to Hilāl, written in Ibn Buṭlān's own hand.¹¹ Other first-hand material came to the attention of Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 668/1270),¹² who, as we shall see below, sometimes had access to autograph manuscripts of works by Ibn Buṭlān, or copies bearing informative colophons. So to a very considerable extent, our central source for a wealth of rich information on his life and career is Ibn Buṭlān himself. This

Wiesbaden, 1985. The editor has also published a German translation, *Das Ärztebänkett, Ibn Buṭlān*, Stuttgart, 1984.

⁸ See *GAL*, vol. I, p. 324, where, however, the list of works confuses his own books with those of his father.

⁹ Yāqūt, *Muṣam al-buldān* (*Jacut's geographisches Wörterbuch*), ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1866–73), vol. I, p. 382, quoting, concerning the town of Antioch, 'the missive that Ibn Buṭlān wrote to Abū l-Ḥusayn Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin al-Šābiʿ in Baghdad in about [AH] 440, in which he said. . .'. Cf. also vol. II, p. 306, about Aleppo: 'I read in the missive that the physician Ibn Buṭlān sent to Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin ibn Ibrāhīm al-Šābiʿ in about the year 440, concerning the Mirdāsids. . .'; p. 785, on al-Ruṣāfa: 'Ibn Buṭlān mentioned it in his missive to Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin, saying. . . Ibn Buṭlān wrote this missive in the year 440'; vol. III, p. 729, on 'Imm: 'Ibn Buṭlān said in the missive he wrote in the year 440 (misprinted as 540) to Ibn al-Šābiʿ. . .'; vol. IV, p. 1003, about Jaffa: 'Ibn Buṭlān said in the missive he wrote in the year 442. . .'

¹⁰ Al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, ed. J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, p. 294, naming both the author and the name of the book in which he has found the quotations from Ibn Buṭlān's correspondence.

¹¹ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī taʾrīkh Ḥalab*, ed. Suhayl Zakkār, Beirut, n.d., vol. I, p. 85, on Antioch: 'I read in the handwriting of Ghars al-Niʿma Muḥammad ibn Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin in the *Kūtāb al-rabīʿ*. . . copying the handwriting of the physician Ibn Buṭlān in the missive [Ibn Buṭlān] wrote to [Ghars al-Niʿma's] father Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin, after his departure from Baghdad, in which he informed him of conditions in the lands through which he passed on his journey, which took place in the year 440. . .'

¹² Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, ed. A. Müller, Cairo, 1299/1882, and Königsberg, 1884.

material is complemented by important biographical notices devoted to him in the sources named above, by the detailed comments made about him by Usāma ibn Munqidh (d. 584/1188),¹³ and by references elsewhere to some of the same points that Ibn Buṭlān discusses, especially in the collection of double-rhyming poems, the *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, by Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1058), who was (as we shall see below) a contemporary and friend of Ibn Buṭlān.¹⁴

Abū l-Ḥasan al-Mukhtār ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Abdūn, known as Ibn Buṭlān, was a Nestorian Christian probably born sometime in the first quarter of the eleventh century.¹⁵ No birth date for him is known, but such details had not yet become socially significant in his day, and like so many other people he probably did not know himself when he had been born.¹⁶ Some information is available or can be concluded about him personally. He apparently was not very attractive in appearance,¹⁷ which was problematic since it was considered that a physician should be of a demeanour and appearance such as would reassure the patient.¹⁸ When attacked on this account later in life, Ibn Buṭlān replied that—quite apart from the fact that his opponent was no less hideous looking than himself—physical appearance was given by God; the merit of a doctor depended upon his professional expertise, not his handsome face.¹⁹ As we shall see presently, he was also an eager student, ambitious, curious about the world around him, and something of an idealist.

He studied in the al-Karkh district of Baghdad,²⁰ where many Christians dwelled, and he undertook an ecclesiastical education. Upon

¹³ Usāma ibn Munqidh, *Kitāb al-ʿitibār* (Usāmah's Memoirs), ed. P. K. Hitti, Princeton, 1930, pp. 183–5; trans. P. K. Hitti as *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman*, New York, 1927, pp. 214–7.

¹⁴ Al-Ma‘arrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, ed. Kāmil al-Yāzījī, Beirut, 1412/1992, in two volumes.

¹⁵ It is important to note that there is no *explicit* evidence for Ibn Buṭlān's confessional identity within eastern Christianity. Graf places him among the Nestorians in *GCAL*, vol. II, pp. 191–4, and Schacht refers to him as ‘certainly’ a Nestorian in *ET*², vol. III, p. 740. Nestorian affiliation appears to be most likely and is presumed here, but the issue would be worth investigating separately.

¹⁶ Cf. L. I. Conrad, “Seven and the *Tasbīʿ*: on the implications of numerical symbolism for the study of medieval Islamic history”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, 1988, pp. 57–65.

¹⁷ Such is the observation in al-Qifī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, p. 294. But this may be his surmise from having read the polemical epistles exchanged between Ibn Buṭlān and Ibn Ridwān (see below), in which ugliness is one of the many *ad hominem* issues raised.

¹⁸ See, for example, M. Levey, trans., “Medical Ethics of Medieval Islam, with Special Reference to al-Ruhāwī's *Practical Ethics of the Physician*”, in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 57.3, 1967, pp. 53–5.

¹⁹ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, pp. 63–5 (text), pp. 97–100 (trans.).

²⁰ Al-Qifī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, p. 294.

- Usāma ibn Munqidh, *Memoirs of an Arab-Syrian Gentleman*, trans. P. K. Hitti, New York, 1927.
- , *Kitāb al-ʿitibār* (Usāmah's Memoirs), ed. P. K. Hitti, Princeton, 1930.
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- , "Le Témoignage d'al-Maturidi sur la doctrine des Manichéens, des Daysanites et des Marcionites", *Arabica* 13, 1966, pp. 1–38, 113–28.
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- , *Nonnus de Nisibe, traité apologétique, étude, texte et traduction* (Bibliothèque du Muséon 21), Louvain, 1948.
- , "Trois auteurs chalcédoniens syriens: Georges de Martyropolis, Constantin et Léon de Harran", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 3, 1972, pp. 125–53.
- Vasiliev, A., "The Life of St Theodore of Edessa", *Byzantion* 16, 1942–3, pp. 165–225.
- , "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, AD 721", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 and 10, 1956.
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- Zahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Taʾrīkh ḥukamāʾ al-Islām*, ed. M. K. ʿAlī, Damascus, 1365/1946.
- Zakī, A. K., *Usāma ibn Munqidh*, Cairo, 1968.
- Zayyāt, H., "Shuhadāʾ al-Naṣrāniyya fī al-Islām", *Al-Mashriq* 36, 1938, pp. 463–5.

auspices of ‘Alī ibn Riḏwān,²⁶ one of the leading medical authors of the day and the chief physician to the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mustanṣir (r. 427/1036–487/1094).²⁷

Travelling north up the Euphrates and then west into Syria, he reached Aleppo in 27 days.²⁸ Here he managed to gain the favour of Mu‘izz al-Dawla Thimāl ibn Šāliḥ, the Mirdāsīd ruler of the city and its environs,²⁹ and set himself up in medical practice. Interestingly enough, he succeeded in making such an impression that tales about him entered the local oral tradition of north Syria, eventually reaching the notable Usāma ibn Munqidh, who recorded them in his *Kūṭāb al-‘itibār*.³⁰ Not surprisingly, there appears to be a good measure of legend to this material. A good example is the following anecdote:

This Ibn Buṭlān displayed marvellous success in [his] medical practice. One day a man came to him in his shop in Aleppo; the fellow could scarcely speak, and when he did hardly anything of what he said could be understood. ‘What is your trade,’ Ibn Buṭlān asked him. The man replied: ‘I am a sifter.’ ‘Go and bring me half a *raṭl*³¹ of astringent vinegar,’ Ibn Buṭlān told him. When the man returned with the vinegar Ibn Buṭlān told him to drink it. He did so and sat for a moment, and then became nauseous and vomited large amounts of clay [mixed] with the vinegar he had drunk. Then his throat became clear and his speech was restored to normal, whereupon Ibn Buṭlān said to his son and students: ‘Do not treat anyone with this medication, for you will kill him. In this case so much dust had been deposited in his oesophagus that nothing but vinegar could remove it.’³²

²⁶ See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, vol. I, p. 241.

²⁷ A useful summary of the life and career of Ibn Riḏwān is M. W. Dols’ ‘Introduction’ to his (with A. S. Gamal) *Medieval Islamic Medicine: Ibn Riḏwān’s “On the Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt”*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, pp. 54–5. Cf. also Conrad, ‘Scholarship and Social Context’, pp. 88–90.

²⁸ Ghars al-Ni‘ma al-Šābi‘, *Rabī‘* (in al-Qifī, *Ta’rīkh al-ḥukamā’*, p. 295; only partially reproduced in Yāqūt, *Mu‘jam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 306).

²⁹ Al-Qifī, *Ta’rīkh al-ḥukamā’*, p. 315; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, *‘Uyūn al-anbā’*, vol. I, p. 241.

³⁰ On this work, see H. Derenbourg, *Usāma ibn Munkidh, un émigré syrien au premier siècle des croisades (1095–1188)*, Paris, 1889–93, vol. I; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Ālūsī, *Usāma ibn Munqidh, baṭal al-ḥurūb al-ṣalibiyya*, Baghdad, 1387/1968, pp. 7–77; Aḥmad Kamāl Zakī, *Usāma ibn Munqidh*, Cairo, 1968; Ḥasan ‘Abbās, *Usāma ibn Munqidh: ḥayāuḥu wa-āthāruḥu*, Cairo, 1981, vol. I, pp. 7–157; D. W. Morray, *The Genius of Usāmah ibn Munqidh: aspects of Kitāb al-‘itibār by Usāmah ibn Munqidh*, Durham, 1987; L. I. Conrad, ‘Usāma ibn Munqidh and Other Witnesses to Frankish and Islamic Medicine in the Era of the Crusades’, in Z. Amar, E. Lev, and J. Schwartz (eds), *Medicine in Jerusalem throughout the Ages*, Tel Aviv, 1999, pp. 27–52.

³¹ In Aleppo in the fifth/eleventh century this would mean about three quarters of a litre. See Walter Hinz, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*, 2nd edn, Leiden, 1970, p. 30.

³² Usāma ibn Munqidh, *Kūṭāb al-‘itibār*, p. 184.

At first glance this appears to be a perfectly innocuous report bearing a wealth of valuable details; it tells us that Ibn Buṭlān had a son in Aleppo, that he maintained a formal medical practice, that he attracted students, and that people came to him for treatment of problematic cases. But what son? The story clearly presupposes an older child or young man learning and observing with his father's students. A child conceived in Aleppo would not even have been born by the time Ibn Buṭlān left the city, so the son must have come with him from Baghdad. But our traveller was by his own account destitute and desperate when he left his home town, all indications are that he moved without dependants—as did the vast majority of travelling scholars in the medieval Middle East—and in fact had no dependants, and it is hardly likely that he would have brought a son on a journey that was so uncertain and not without perils. So the son is simply a literary motif, and if this is the case then perhaps so are the students, and the shop, and the patient, and so forth. A doctor would usually see patients in his house, not in a 'shop' (*dukkān*), and a large dose of vinegar drunk all at once, though certainly nauseating, would not have been dangerous, much less fatal, to most patients with a speech difficulty. Indeed, the tale seems to presume that the larynx lies at the top of the oesophagus rather than the trachea; it is thus unlikely to have originated in any medical quarter. The most plausible interpretation of this story, and several other anecdotes that Usāma retails about our traveller, is that the name of Ibn Buṭlān was attached to a number of baseless tales that simply evoked the image of an ideal type—the medical sage, surrounded by eager students, receiving and curing difficult and distressing cases by virtue of superior medical knowledge that others do not possess.³³

A similar legend was taken up by Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī (d. 884/1479) in his now-lost *Kunūz al-dhahab*.³⁴ Here we are told about Ibn Buṭlān's supposed establishment of the hospital later renovated by Nūr al-Dīn:

It is said that he founded the hospital in Aleppo that was later renovated by Nūr al-Dīn. He chose for it the site where it presently stands in Aleppo, selecting it over all other possible locations. He tested sites for salubrity using meat, which he hung up all over Aleppo; for the erection of a hospital he found no place better than this site, since [here] the meat remained unaltered.³⁵

³³ Cf. Conrad, "Usāma ibn Munqidh", pp. 35–8, on Usāma's attitude toward and use of his source materials.

³⁴ The unfinished autograph copy of this work was in the ownership of the renowned Egyptian collector Aḥmad Taymūr Pāshā (d. 1348/1930), and was used by Muḥammad Rāghib al-Ṭabbākh al-Ḥalabī in his *Flām al-nubalā' bi-ta'rīkh Ḥalab al-shahbā'*, ed. Muḥammad Kamāl, Aleppo, 1988; cf. vol. I, pp. 43–4, on the Taymūr MS.

³⁵ Quoted in al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 186. The point of the test

One is already put on alert by the cautionary way in which Abū Dharr introduces the report: 'it is said' (*qīla*). And exactly the same story had already been told—and equally falsely—about the foundation of the 'Aḍudī Hospital in Baghdad by al-Rāzī (d. 313/925),³⁶ who in fact had died before this hospital was built. So what we have here is clearly a topos that could drift from one place and personality to another,³⁷ and hence again we see Ibn Buṭlān as the focus for later popular lore.

It must of course be conceded that the image of Ibn Buṭlān as a renowned physician could in itself reflect an accurate memory of him, but probably not from this stage of his career, and not from a supposed early medical practice in Aleppo. It is reported by al-Qiftī, who repeats none of the legends about Ibn Buṭlān, that he did not like Aleppo,³⁸ and the reasons for this are not far to seek. At Ibn Buṭlān's request, the governor entrusted him with the regulation of Christian worship.³⁹ We are told that he 'began to enforce religious regulations according to the principles and provisions of their [creed]' (*wa-akhadha fī iqāmat al-qawānīn al-dīniyya 'alā uṣūlihīm wa-shurūṭihīm*), and by this we should probably understand that he proceeded to change things. Whatever his activities were, they irritated the Christians of Aleppo. The final break came when he met the Christian physician and secretary Abū al-Khayr al-Mubārak ibn Sharāra (d. c. 490/1097)⁴⁰ and discussed medicine with him. The conversation, probably in public, turned on issues of logical classification at which Ibn Buṭlān, as the prize student of the renowned logician Ibn al-Ṭayyib,⁴¹ must have been quite adept, while Ibn Sharāra had no particular skill or knowledge in such things.⁴² The exchange became confrontational, and in its wake Ibn Sharāra felt that he had been humiliated. He vilified the visitor and turned the Christian community against him, and Ibn Buṭlān was thus hurried into a premature departure.⁴³ Not surprisingly, he finds only occasional mention

was that corrupt unhealthy air would cause the meat to change colour or smell, or to rot.

³⁶ See Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, *Uyūn al-ambā'*, vol. I, pp. 309–10.

³⁷ On topos, see A. Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: a source-critical study*, 2nd edn in collaboration with L. I. Conrad, trans. M. Bonner, Princeton, 1994, pp. 109–10.

³⁸ Al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh al-hukamā'*, p. 294: *wa-mā ḥamidahā*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 315; Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, *Uyūn al-ambā'*, vol. I, p. 241.

⁴⁰ On him see al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh al-hukamā'*, p. 330; al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 201; *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 195; *GAL*, vol. I, pp. 482–3; suppl. I, p. 884.

⁴¹ See, for example, Ibn al-Ṭayyib's *Tafsīr kitāb tsāghūṭ li-Furūṭiyūs*, ed. K. Gyekye, Beirut, 1975. Cf. also *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 161; S. M. Stern, 'Ibn al-Ṭayyib's Commentary on the *Isaḡoge*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, 1957, pp. 419–25.

⁴² Al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh al-hukamā'*, p. 330; al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 201.

⁴³ Al-Qiftī, *Ta'rikh al-hukamā'*, p. 315.

in Ibn al-ʿAdīm's biographical dictionary of notables associated with Aleppo and has no entry of his own in this work.

Two days' travel brought him to Antioch, which was then under Byzantine rule. Ibn Buṭlān makes no particular note of this fact, but describes the town in colourful and favourable terms.⁴⁴ From Antioch it was on to Latakia, where he refers to his conversations with monks and Christian hermits, who impressed him with their wisdom and insight.⁴⁵ He then proceeded to Damascus. He gains no notice in the *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq* of Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), but this may be due to a brief stay or the narrow specialisation of the interests he expressed there. He seems to have spent some time in discussions with colleagues on scientific and medical topics and tapped into a debate that had apparently been going on for some time before he arrived. A certain Ibn al-Muwaffaqī, an author now otherwise unknown to us, had taken up the question of whether or not a chicken is warmer by nature than the young of the bird. His view was that the chicken is warmer,⁴⁶ and to this essay a certain Georgius ibn Yuḥannā al-Yabrūdī, a Monophysite Christian from Yabrūd, near Damascus, countered with an argument in favour of the young of the bird as the warmer of the two.⁴⁷ A modern reader will of course wonder what the point of all this could be, since a chicken is a bird, but in medieval scholastic scholarship the question was important since it posed a dilemma in the Greek natural science inherited by medieval Islam. In this system warmth is associated with quickness of movement; hence the chicken ought to be warmer, since a recently hatched chick can already peck at seeds for its food, while the young of flying birds must remain in the nest for several weeks. Apparently, however, there was a conflicting theory postulating that the young bird ought to be warmer. Ibn Buṭlān did not contradict al-Yabrūdī, who had died shortly before his arrival in Damascus, but thought that his Syrian predecessor had argued incorrectly.⁴⁸ Though innocent enough at the time, this debate was very soon to have enormous repercussions for Ibn Buṭlān.

By now nearly a year had passed, and in Jumādā II 441/November 1049 Ibn Buṭlān finally arrived in Cairo⁴⁹ and sought the support and patronage of ʿAlī ibn Riḍwān. By doing so, he indicated that his

⁴⁴ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Šābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qiflī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*), pp. 296–7; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. I, pp. 382–5; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. I, pp. 85–6).

⁴⁵ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Šābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qiflī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*), p. 298).

⁴⁶ Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. II, p. 143.

⁴⁷ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, pp. 35–6 (text), pp. 70–1 (trans.); Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. II, p. 143.

⁴⁸ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, pp. 37–8 (text), pp. 73–5 (trans.).

⁴⁹ Date in Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. I, p. 241.

aspirations were of the highest possible kind. At first all seems to have gone well. Our Baghdadi traveller was introduced to Ibn Riḍwān at the palace of the Fāṭimid *amīr* Jawhar ibn Mādī, where the chief physician received Ibn Buṭlān warmly and praised him to the assembled company.⁵⁰ One would of course wonder what basis Ibn Riḍwān would have had for such enthusiasm. The answer probably lies in the fact that on his travels through Syria Ibn Buṭlān had already been sending missives back to Hilāl al-Šābi' in Baghdad,⁵¹ and once in Cairo he proceeded to work on his notes and drafts with the aim of producing a polished literary work, probably along the lines of what Miquel would call 'la géographie humaine'.⁵² His project was sufficiently well-known to Egyptian scholars for them to clamour impatiently for him to finish and publish his work⁵³ and it is hardly likely that Ibn Riḍwān would have remained ignorant of what was well known to others in the city. The *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* suggests that after their first meeting Ibn Riḍwān continued to be helpful and supportive, introducing Ibn Buṭlān to leading personalities in the various fields of medicine in Cairo.⁵⁴

But the *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* also clearly and deliberately implies that Ibn Buṭlān soon found Ibn Riḍwān to be an unscrupulous and miserly profiteer and the worthies of Cairo to be unimpressive in their learning and expertise and self-important frauds preoccupied with their own posturing and status rather than with the issues of their professions.⁵⁵ Caution is in order here, since the *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* was written years later and surely reflects Ibn Buṭlān's bitterness over the eventual turn of events and the failure of the medical profession in Cairo to support him. In any case, it is clear that he considered himself deserving of more expeditious progress in eminence than was possible under the aegis of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān. Encouraged by an unnamed personality at

⁵⁰ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, p. 108 (trans.).

⁵¹ Cf. the quotations in nn. 9–11 above. The sources repeatedly speak of 'his missive' (*risāla*)—i.e. in the singular—with reference to these letters, but there can be no doubt that there were several of them and that the series extended over several years. The dates cited for accounts of different places vary, and Ibn al-'Adīm at one point refers to 'one of his missives' (*ba'd rasā'ilihī*), see *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. I, p. 459. Most significant is the fact that while several quotations in Yāqūt are dated to AH 440, in al-Qifṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 295, we find Ibn Buṭlān writing to Hilāl al-Šābi' from Cairo, i.e. after his arrival there in AH 441.

⁵² See A. Miquel, *La géographie humaine du monde musulmane jusqu'au milieu du 11^e siècle*, Paris, 1967–88, vol. I, pp. 113–89, 331–62, for some valuable indications.

⁵³ Al-Qifṭī, *Ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 295.

⁵⁴ *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'*, pp. 14–29; trans. Klein-Franke, pp. 61–80. The other guests at the dinner party include representatives from the fields of natural science, eye disorders, surgery, phlebotomy, pharmacy and general medicine.

⁵⁵ *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'*, pp. 28–87; trans. Klein-Franke, pp. 78–140.

the court (the *wazīr* Jawhar ibn Mādī?),⁵⁶ he took up his objections to al-Yabrūdī's essay on the warmth of chickens and young birds, perhaps on the basis of notes or a draft he had prepared in Damascus, and sent an open essay on the subject to 'Alī ibn Riḍwān.⁵⁷ His aim was clearly to appeal over the chief physician's head to the broader audience of the literate and cultivated elite of Cairo. A favourable reaction at that level might find him a more energetic patron, or at least oblige Ibn Riḍwān to expedite his progress.

Ibn Buṭlān had good reason to hope that his work would be well-received. In it he displays an easy command of Aristotelian thought, and in any case his subject was one of considerable interest in Fāṭimid Cairo, where poultry-raising and the artificial incubation of eggs comprised a major local industry.⁵⁸ But the result, unfortunately, was catastrophe. First, as Ibn Buṭlān probably did not know, the late al-Yabrūdī had been a personal friend of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān,⁵⁹ who was therefore unlikely to be pleased with an essay dismissive of al-Yabrūdī's scientific learning. Second, as he may well have already known, Ibn Riḍwān was a self-taught scholar who had wanted to travel to Baghdad to study with Ibn al-Ṭayyib, but could not afford to do so.⁶⁰ For one of this renowned teacher's students to appear in Cairo and then imperpertinently pressure him for support may well have struck a raw nerve. Third, and as he certainly knew, Ibn Riḍwān was a difficult and insecure man forever worried about his position and status as the leading physician in Egypt, fearful of the possibility that some other author's work would supersede a book of his own, and sensitive about his background as a part-time fortune-teller and a poor baker's son made good. He had already written polemical works against such eminent medical authorities of the past as Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq (d. 260/873) and al-Rāzī, and contemporaries whom he had critiqued included Ibn Buṭlān's own teacher Ibn al-Ṭayyib in Baghdad and Ibn al-Jazzār (d. c. 395/1004) in al-Qayrawān.⁶¹ Now, in response to Ibn Buṭlān's epistle, he published two fierce critiques of his impatient protegee.⁶²

⁵⁶ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, p. 35 (text), p. 70 (trans.); cf. *ibid.*, p. 48 (text), p. 82 (trans.), referring to a *wazīr*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 34–9 (text), pp. 70–6 (trans.).

⁵⁸ A detailed account of this industry as practised in the Cairo area is given in 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629/1231), *Al-Ifāda wa-l-ʿtibār*, ed. Aḥmad Ghassān Sabānū, Damascus, 1403/1983, pp. 35–8.

⁵⁹ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, p. 41 (text), p. 77 (trans.).

⁶⁰ Cf. the discussion of this point in Conrad, "Scholarship and Social Context", p. 95.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88–90.

⁶² One of these survives in *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, pp. 40–6 (text), pp. 76–80 (trans.); the other has been lost.

Ibn Buṭlān considered that Ibn Riḍwān was just venting his spleen with his usual fondness for 'idle uproar' (*shaghab al-bāṭil*),⁶³ and in the *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ* he compares himself to the dinner guest who is vilified by his host for nibbling at the leftovers on his table.⁶⁴ Had he simply accepted his chastening and let the matter rest it is possible that he could have redeemed the situation and stabilised his prospects in Cairo. But what we have seen of him in Aleppo prepares us for a more precipitous course of action. Supported by a highly placed personality,⁶⁵ he wrote a long defence of his own position in Dhū al-Hijja 441/May 1050,⁶⁶ only to be excoriated anew in five further essays by Ibn Riḍwān: a follow-up critique,⁶⁷ an appeal to the physicians of Cairo to support him and to have nothing further to do with this impertinent and undeserving upstart,⁶⁸ and three subsequent open missives against his adversary that have since been lost. As all this came from the chief physician of Cairo, whom no one at the Fāṭimid court was prepared to oppose openly for the sake of the newcomer from Baghdad, it effectively meant the ostracism of Ibn Buṭlān and the destruction of any opportunities he may once have had in Egypt. At the end of his *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ* Ibn Buṭlān describes his fate by portraying the dinner guest as returning the next day to try to make amends with the outraged host, only to have the latter rebuff him and slam the window shutter in his face.⁶⁹

Though defeated and disgraced, Ibn Buṭlān seems to have remained in Cairo for some time after his dispute with Ibn Riḍwān; we are told that he left after a stay of three years,⁷⁰ while the main course of the controversy was played out within about six to nine months of his arrival. This cannot be correct, however. As we shall see below, there is convincing evidence from his own accounts and the testimony of others placing him in Syria and Constantinople in 442/1050. Ibn Riḍwān's repeated follow-up polemics against him ought to have convinced him that it was now too late for him simply to ride out the storm, and the ambitious streak we see in him elsewhere suggests that he would not have remained in Cairo for long after his professional prospects had been so fatally compromised by his quarrel with Ibn Riḍwān.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 47 (text), p. 81 (trans.).

⁶⁴ *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ*, pp. 88–91; trans. Klein-Franke, pp. 141–4.

⁶⁵ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, p. 48 (text), p. 82 (trans.).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 47–71 (text), pp. 81–107 (trans.).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 72–6 (text), pp. 107–12 (trans.).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 77–84 (text), pp. 112–18 (trans.).

⁶⁹ *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ*, p. 91; trans. Klein-Franke, p. 144.

⁷⁰ Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. I, p. 241; Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī, *Ḳunūz al-dhahab* (in al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalāʾ*, vol. IV, p. 186).

Returning to Syria in 442/1050, he headed north and passed through Jaffa.⁷¹ There is no record of any return to Aleppo, probably due to ill will there after his previous visit and the altercation with Ibn Sharāra. The Christian community in Aleppo had already been reciting offensive verses about him, and when he died there circulated a tale according to which the lamp over his tomb went out every time it was lit.⁷² Abū Dharr cites an essay of Ibn Buṭlān's on hot and cold remedies in which our author reports on certain conditions in Aleppo on the authority of 'master teachers' (*mashāyikh*) of the city;⁷³ as these details concern basic matters like its cold weather and the habitability of its old houses, it is significant that Ibn Buṭlān needed to be told such things in the first place—the implication is that he did not in fact live there, though Abū Dharr says that he divided his time between Aleppo and Antioch.⁷⁴

He certainly did return to Antioch, however, and he may have been well-regarded there since his teacher Ibn al-Ṭayyib had been a native son of Antioch.⁷⁵ He was able to provide details on the administration of the Church of al-Qusyān, the king whose son was revived by St Peter,⁷⁶ and the serious damage done to the building by a bolt of lightning during a terrible storm in 442/1050.⁷⁷ This was in April, and it appears that he was still in the city through most of the summer, since in another elegant account he uses his informants in Antioch to describe a great series of tremors that had struck a town in Byzantine territory on 5 August 1050. People in Antioch heard that a large church and a fortress were swallowed up; many farms were flooded by extremely hot thermal springs, and a new swamp emerged in the area. People fled to hilltops with whatever they could save from their homes, but the earth shook to such an extent that their belongings rolled back down the hillsides to the plain below.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Šābi', *Rabī'* (in Yāqūt, *Muḥjam al-buldān*, vol. IV, p. 1003).

⁷² Al-Qiftī, *Ta'riḫ al-hukamā'*, p. 315.

⁷³ Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī, *Kunūz al-dhahab* (in al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 186).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. X, p. 4571. No other source seems to know this; the medieval authorities and modern scholarship usually assume that Ibn al-Ṭayyib was of Iraqi origin.

⁷⁶ This appears to have been a local legend. It is not Biblical, and I can find no information on it in eastern Christian literature. Inquiries with Syrian Christian colleagues in Aleppo and elsewhere in the vicinity also produced no results.

⁷⁷ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Šābi', *Rabī'* (in Yāqūt, *Muḥjam al-buldān*, vol. I, pp. 383–5; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. I, pp. 85–6).

⁷⁸ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Šābi', *Rabī'* (in Yāqūt, *Muḥjam al-buldān*, vol. I, p. 385).

Once he left Antioch Ibn Buṭlān journeyed to Tarsus, where he observed the dilapidated condition of the tomb of al-Ma'mūn;⁷⁹ he then continued across Asia Minor and made his way to Constantinople, where he entered a monastery. In 446/1054 he witnessed a terrible epidemic in the city; it filled all the cemeteries, and when there was no more room 14,000 corpses had to be buried in the Church of St Lucas.⁸⁰ In the same year, and still while living in Constantinople, he was invited to write his *Maqāla fī al-qurbān al-muqaddas* ('Essay on the Holy Eucharist'), a refutation of the Latin position on the subject having to do largely with the controversial issue of whether or not one can use unleavened bread.⁸¹ This piece is of historical interest since it figured in the prelude to the dispute between Pope Leo IX (r. 1049–54) and the patriarch of Constantinople Michael I Cerularius (r. 1043–58) that within a few weeks would lead to the schism between the Eastern and Western churches.

As will have been clear from his activities elsewhere, Ibn Buṭlān made it his business to seek patronage at the highest levels when he arrived at a new destination. The fact that in Constantinople he was invited to write on the Eucharist suggests that his success in such endeavours was not limited to Islamic circles, and this impression is confirmed by the fact that an emissary of the 'Uqaylid *amīr* Za'im al-Dawla Baraka ibn al-Muqallid met him in the Byzantine capital and later noted, on the one hand, the lavish support he received there from Ibn Buṭlān, and on the other, the traveller's access to the emperor himself.⁸² The brevity of the *amīr*'s reign confirms that Ibn Buṭlān was in Constantinople sometime between 442/1050 and 443/1052.

In 450/1058, still smarting from his rough treatment at the hands of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān six years previously, he wrote his *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* as a metaphorical account of his troubles. This work is dedicated to Naṣr al-Dawla Abū Naṣr Aḥmad ibn Marwān, the Marwānid ruler of Diyār Bakr,⁸³ and the starting point for the tale is given as a young physician who comes from Baghdad to Māyrafāriqīn, an important town in the region of Diyār Bakr.⁸⁴ The colophon of the autograph

⁷⁹ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Ṣābi', *Al-hafawāt al-nādira*, ed. Ṣāliḥ al-Ashtar, Damascus, 1387/1967, pp. 115–16.

⁸⁰ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *ʿUyūn al-anbā'*, vol. I, p. 242, copying from Ibn Buṭlān's own autograph copy of this account (*wa-naqaltu min khaṭṭihi fīmā dhakara min dhālika mā hādha amthāluhu*...).

⁸¹ The text has been partially edited and translated in G. Graf, "Die Eucharistielehre des Nestorianers al-Muḥtār ibn Buṭlān (11. Jahrh.)", *Oriens Christianus* 35, 1938, pp. 44–70, 175–91. Cf. also *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 193.

⁸² Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Ṣābi', *Al-hafawāt al-nādira*, pp. 115–17.

⁸³ *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'*, p. 3; trans. Klein-Franke, p. 47.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5. On the town in this period, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw (wr. after 444/1052),

copy seen by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, however, states that Ibn Buṭlān wrote this book while still in a monastery outside Constantinople.⁸⁵ Other information from Ibn Buṭlān does record him in influential company at Māyyafāriqīn,⁸⁶ however, and it seems that he went there with the *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* already finished as a present through which he hoped to gain favour in high places, and support for formal medical science there (to be fostered by himself, no doubt) by stressing that at present the local level of medical competence was abysmally low.⁸⁷ If this was the case, one would further conclude that Ibn Buṭlān had already been in Māyyafāriqīn on his way to Constantinople, and thus had contacts from which he could anticipate a favourable reception for his *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'* upon a return visit.

At some point in his travels in north Syria he entered the service of Abū al-Mutawwaj Muqallad ibn Naṣr ibn Munqidh, the great-grandfather of Usāma ibn Munqidh, at Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān. Unlike the local anecdotes Usāma retails, his information on Ibn Buṭlān in the service of his ancestors belongs to the domain of family history and seems more reliable. The story told of him has to do with Abū l-Mutawwaj's son 'Alī:

White patches appeared on my grandfather Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muqallad ibn Naṣr ibn Munqidh, who was then a young boy. This distressed his father, who feared that he had leprosy. So he summoned Ibn Buṭlān and told him: 'Check to see what has appeared on 'Alī's body.' So he examined him and said: 'For 500 *dīnārs* I will treat him and rid him of this,' whereupon my great-grandfather said to him: 'Were you to cure 'Alī I would not be content to give you [only] 500 *dīnārs*.' When Ibn Buṭlān saw how angry my great-grandfather was, he said: 'My lord, I am your servant and slave and at the mercy of your bounty. What I said I meant only in jest. These [spots] on 'Alī are but a herpes-like skin problem typical of youth, and as he matures they will disappear. So do not worry about him, and do not allow someone else to tell you: "I will cure him", and turn a profit at your expense.' Matters turned out just as he said.⁸⁸

There seems to be no reason to doubt the truth of this account, which shows Ibn Buṭlān in a favourable light as a physician of considerable integrity. More generally, it confirms that in historical terms there is a diverse range of material on offer in the memoirs of Usāma.

Book of Travels, trans. W. M. Thackston, New York, 1986, pp. 7–8, based on his visit there in Jumādā I 438/November 1046.

⁸⁵ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-anbā'*, vol. I, p. 243.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 232, quoting Ibn Buṭlān's essay on hot and cold remedies.

⁸⁷ *Da'wat al-aṭibbā'*, pp. 28–87; trans. Klein-Franke, pp. 78–140. This agenda of course has a crucial second aim, in that the whole discussion is an allegory on Ibn Buṭlān's experiences in Cairo.

⁸⁸ Usāma ibn Munqidh, *Kitāb al-ʿitibār*, p. 184.

The last years of Ibn Buṭlān's life are obscure. At some unknown date he returned to Antioch, of which he was certainly very fond. In the year 455/1063 he wrote an essay on the reasons for some changes in medical practice over the previous century, having to do with hot and cold remedies, and in the colophon to this work he states that it was completed for a friend 'at a time when I was physically exhausted and mentally distraught with all of my capacities devoted to the construction (*binā*)⁸⁹ of the hospital in Antioch'.⁹⁰ From this it would seem that he was still very active and that his services were still in demand. The later historian Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī says that one of his contemporaries saw it written in the hand of a member of the Sharāra family in Aleppo—the descendants of his old adversary al-Mubārak ibn Sharāra—that Ibn Buṭlān died in Antioch on Friday, 8 Shawwāl 458/2 September 1066;⁹¹ his place of death is confirmed by the fact that his tomb was known and visited in a church in Antioch.⁹²

Out of this rich and varied career there emerge several issues for which the available information allows us to speak in greater detail. First, what were this obviously talented and broadly learned man's views on the educational institutions available in his day for the study of medicine? The system had obviously served him well, but it must be borne in mind that study with an eminent teacher was not the only way by which one could gain access to the field in the medieval Middle East.⁹³ Our subject's adversary in Cairo, Ibn Riḍwān, had been self-taught; unable to afford travel to Baghdad, he scraped and saved for books and told fortunes by the roadside until an opportunity to fill in for a colleague provided him with an entrée into medical practice.⁹⁴ But even Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) had been self-taught in medicine, though there may be an element of self-promotion here: this statement is made in his autobiography, where he says that he simply did not find medicine a challenging subject.⁹⁵ One could also gain access to the field through one's family. A physician's son, nephew, or cousin

⁸⁹ Or 'repair'; the Arabic term can be read either way.

⁹⁰ Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī, *Kimūz al-dhahab* (in al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 186), citing the colophon of what he thinks is the autograph copy of the manuscript. The gist of the colophon is summarised in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-anbā'*, vol. I, p. 243.

⁹¹ Al-Ṭabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 187.

⁹² Al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 315.

⁹³ See G. Leiser, "Medical Education in Islamic Lands from the Seventh to the Fourteenth Century", *Journal of the History of Medicine* 38, 1983, pp. 48–75.

⁹⁴ Discussion in Conrad, "Scholarship and Social Context", p. 88.

⁹⁵ See W. E. Gohlman ed. and trans., *The Life of Ibn Sina*, Albany NY, 1974, pp. 24–6 (text), pp. 25–7 (trans.).

could study with him without payment,⁹⁶ and this was also an opportunity to gain access to an established clientele, hard-to-find books, and costly instruments. The relatives of Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq in Iraq pursued this line of access, and in later centuries in Iraq and Iran the Bakhtīshū^c family comprised a veritable medical dynasty in these lands.⁹⁷

But Ibn Buṭlān insisted that there was no substitute for formal study at the feet of a teacher, reading and correcting texts under his guidance. In oral instruction, he says, if a student does not understand the words of a text or teacher, the latter can explain. Oral expression conveys more clearly what a text means, since meaning is more than the sum of the words used to articulate it; vision (i.e. reading unaided out of a book) gives access to the words, but not necessarily to their meaning. Studying a book under a teacher's guidance, on the other hand, gives complete access to understanding. One must also consider the fact that handwritten manuscripts pose many difficulties to the student unaided by a teacher: ambiguous terminology, copyists' errors, grammatical uncertainties, missing or erroneous vowel signs, use of symbols that are not actually parts of the words, unusual style or manner of expression, corruptions in the textual tradition, use of Greek words that have not been translated, and so forth.⁹⁸ For all of this a teacher is necessary to set the student on the correct course, otherwise one error compounds and leads to another in a vicious circle. Everyone knows that incorrect and erroneous reading is the result of failure to study with an experienced master, he concludes, and this is why scholars avoid manuscripts bearing no *ījāza* to show that they have been transmitted and copied on good authority.⁹⁹

This argument is of course by no means an innocent one, since its clear implication is that Ibn Buṭlān, the student of an acknowledged master, is a better scholar than the self-taught Ibn Riḍwān. Nor is it a completely original one. Rather, it reflects a medieval Arab physician's appreciation for the standard of personally oriented education

⁹⁶ Women are almost entirely invisible in the sources for medical practice in the medieval Islamic world, except as midwives. This picture may change as more archival evidence becomes available, however, as documents from Spain indicate that women did enter medical practice, worked as surgeons, and could even see male patients. See M. R. McVaugh, *Medicine before the Plague: practitioners and their patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285–1345*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 51, 103–7, 140, 162. Cf. the account of the situation in Christian Europe more generally in M. Green, "Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe", *Signs* 14, 1989, pp. 434–73.

⁹⁷ Leiser, "Medical Education", pp. 49–50.

⁹⁸ On such problems, cf. F. Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship*, Rome, 1947, pp. 22–37.

⁹⁹ *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, pp. 50–3 (text), pp. 83–6 (trans.).

that was available—in medicine and philosophy in this case, but also in other fields—at the highest levels of Islamic society in the era of the handwritten book.¹⁰⁰

This sort of intense text-oriented training turned Ibn Buṭlān into a theorist and logician who could wield his Aristotelian foil as well as anyone, but it also fed his interests in and commitment to the practical aspects of his studies, especially in medicine. His *Taqwīm al-ṣiḥḥa* ('Regimen of Health'), for example, is a work in which therapeutical strategies are displayed in tabular form.¹⁰¹ Arguing that there is a greater need for practical advice than for recondite definitions,¹⁰² he provides a work in which one can quickly find the practical information one needs on ailments, drugs and therapy according to what the various schools of medical opinion advise. This text is significant for the professional attitude that it displays. Traditionally, a physician would look for one authoritative solution to a particular medical problem, first of all in Galen, and dismiss other possibilities. Ibn Buṭlān, however, concedes the varieties and anomalies of ancient and contemporary practice and displays the full range of opinion for consideration, occasionally including even the views of Ibn Riḍwān.¹⁰³ In his *Maqāla fī tadbīr al-amrād al-ʿarīḍa li-al-nuḥbān al-sākinīn fī al-adyira wa-min buʿd ʿan al-madīna* ('Discourse on the Treatment of Illnesses that Occur among Monks Living in Monasteries and Far from the City'), he reveals a concern for the practical application of medical knowledge within particular contexts. In his introduction he comments that many eminent medical authorities, both ancient and modern, have compiled detailed and comprehensive medical compendia. But many people find such works cumbersome¹⁰⁴ and would be more favourably inclined toward a more concise and abbreviated account. So he has compiled a slender book that wastes no words and refers only to those drugs that are available in the present day and only those remedies that he knows himself to

¹⁰⁰ The literature on this subject is vast. Some of the best work is G. Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: institutions of learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh, 1981, pp. 75–152; J. Pedersen, *The Arabic Book*, trans. G. French, Princeton, 1984, pp. 20–36; J. Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: a social history of Islamic education*, Princeton, 1992, pp. 21–43; Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice*, pp. 69–90.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, *La médecine au temps des califes: à l'ombre d'Avicenne*, Paris and Gand, 1996, p. 236.

¹⁰² Ibn Buṭlān, *Taqwīm al-ṣiḥḥa*, ed. and trans. H. Elkhadem, *Le Taqwīm al-Ṣiḥḥa (Taqwīm sanītatīs) d'Ibn Buṭlān: un traité médical du XI^e siècle*, Louvain, 1990, p. 71 (text), p. 146 (trans.).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, XXXIII.231, XXXIV.236. There are no references in the text to suggest a date of composition, but the work seems to be rather too mature to be the work of the young Ibn Buṭlān.

¹⁰⁴ Text: *yataḥaqqalūna*; read: *yastaḥṭilūna*.

be effective.¹⁰⁵ He thus adapts the relevant materials from the *Qānūn* of Ibn Sīnā to suit the needs of monks living in monastic communities situated far from any urban centre: what drugs can be substituted for others, what herbs may be known in different places by different names, how can the sick and injured best be treated in a monastic setting, what special arrangements need to be considered for feeding monks and sick Christians during Lent?

In his *Risāla jāmi'a li-funūn nāfi'a fī shirā al-raqīq wa-taqlīb al-'abīd*, on precautions to be observed when purchasing slaves,¹⁰⁶ he again brings his medical learning to bear on a practical subject that was perfectly acceptable in medieval times, and which pursues a theme in Roman medical literature known to medieval Arab physicians through Arabic translations.¹⁰⁷ Here he offers a number of general recommendations to be borne in mind when buying slaves and then discusses more specific topics. One chapter uses his medical knowledge to offer advice on assessing the health of a slave and identifying defects; one with a yellowish skin colouring, for example, is likely to be suffering from a liver disorder (i.e. jaundice). The next follows the physiognomic theories of the philosophers to illustrate ways in which a buyer can discover the character traits of a slave; eyes, for example, reveal whether someone is lazy, devious, envious, clever, stupid, cowardly, etc. This is followed by a discussion of how regional origin may indicate the abilities or properties of a slave: a brief summary on some terminology leads into discussion of the qualities particular to the various parts of the world and the factors for and against the purchase of slave girls from nineteen different lands. The book closes with a chapter of advice on how to avoid being cheated by dishonest slave dealers, and then a closing list of comments on various other points.

This concern for the practical dimensions of his profession is related to the general excitement and eagerness that he manifests during his life of travel. With his departure from Baghdad, Ibn Buṭlān emerges into our view, through his missives to Hilāl al-Šābi', as an earnest

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Buṭlān, "*Maqāla fī tadbīr al-amrāq al-'arīqa li-al-ruhbān al-sākinīn fī al-adyira wa-min bu'd 'an al-madīna* (The Arab Physician Ibn Buṭlān's [d. 1066] Medical Manual for the Use of Monks and Country People)", ed. S. Jadon, PhD dissertation: University of California, Los Angeles, 1968, vol. I, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Buṭlān, *Risāla jāmi'a li-funūn nāfi'a fī shirā al-raqīq wa-taqlīb al-'abīd*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn in his *Nawādir al-makhtūṭāt*, vol. IV, Cairo, 1373/1954, pp. 331–89. On this book see A. Mez, *The Renaissance of Islam*, trans. S. K. Bukhsh, London, 1937, pp. 160–2.

¹⁰⁷ See M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*, Leiden, 1970, p. 74 no. 17. Cf. also F. Pringsheim, *The Greek Law of Sale*, Weimar, 1950, pp. 429–96, on Greek, Roman, and Byzantine law concerning defects in slaves.

observer of the world through which he moves. He gives a good account of the church of al-Ruṣāfa,¹⁰⁸ and describes Aleppo in some detail.¹⁰⁹ He comments on the coastal town and monastery of Dayr Simʿān near Antioch; he puts its size as fully half of the *dār al-khilāfa* in Baghdad, and is extremely impressed by its wealth, which he estimates as 400,000 *dīnārs* per year.¹¹⁰ But not everything he saw evoked a favourable reaction. On his way to Antioch he had to spend a night in the village of ʿImm, which shocked him; the place was full of pigs, prostitutes and wine,¹¹¹ and while there were four churches, there was only one mosque, from which the call to prayer had to be conducted in secret.¹¹² Jaffa must also have disappointed him. The town was in the grip of drought conditions, and so many children had died that no schoolmaster was engaged to teach the boys.¹¹³

He marvelled at the beauty and fertility of the countryside between Aleppo and Antioch; he saw no ruined sites, but rather only one flourishing village after another, their fields full of wheat, barley and olive trees, their gardens in bloom, and their streams full-flowing.¹¹⁴ His beloved Antioch he describes in especially full detail, commenting on its massive defences, its fine palaces and churches, its hospitals, baths and medical amenities, and the ecclesiastical administration in the town. Its environs are full of monasteries, hermits' cells, streams and gardens, he says, and at dawn in these beautiful surroundings there is so much striking on *nawāqīs* and chanting of prayers that one would imagine oneself to be in Paradise.¹¹⁵ Also valuable and similarly observant is his account of Latakia, which, like Antioch, was under Byzantine rule when he stayed there. He implies that the theatre and hippodrome are still in use, and describes a pagan temple that had been converted to a mosque after the Islamic conquest and was now a church. The Muslims have their mosque, however, and summon the faithful to prayer five times a day; but when they do the Rūm inter-

¹⁰⁸ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 785).

¹⁰⁹ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, pp. 295–6; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, pp. 306–8). Cf. the account by Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who passed through the city two years before Ibn Buṭlān, in his *Book of Travels*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 672).

¹¹¹ Cf. the similar complaints in al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, vol. I, p. 320 no. 124 vs 3–4; vol. II, p. 201 no. 71.

¹¹² Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, p. 296; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. III, p. 729).

¹¹³ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. IV, p. 1003).

¹¹⁴ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, p. 296; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. I, p. 383; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. I, p. 85).

¹¹⁵ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, pp. 296–7; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. I, pp. 383–5).

fere by beating on their *nawāqīs*.¹¹⁶ This would seem to confirm the famous verse in which al-Maʿarrī speaks of strife in the city between Muslims and Christians:

In Latakia the rancour twixt Aḥmad and Messiah peaks,
This one takes to clapper while the shaykh in fury shrieks.¹¹⁷

The Muslims also have their own judge. Of particular curiosity to Ibn Buṭlān¹¹⁸ is the Byzantine *agoranomos* (Ibn Buṭlān of course calls him the *muḥtasib*); every day this official assembles all the prostitutes, and those interested in their services bid for them for the night, one by one, and receive stamped tokens comprising the guarantee of the metropolitan (*muṭrān*) that the women and their clients will not be molested if subsequently confronted by the authorities.¹¹⁹

But perhaps Ibn Buṭlān had not been so well served by his masters in Baghdad as he thought. Superbly trained though he was, his world was not that of the politics of academic life, but of like-minded scholars, fascinating and challenging books, and learned discourse. To a certain extent he did know how the game was played, since his essay on the relative warmth of chickens and young birds was precisely the sort of exercise that one might have expected from a newcomer to a major intellectual centre. In the medieval Middle East—as elsewhere, and as today for that matter—many books and essays were written not to push back the frontiers of knowledge or to make learning available to a wider circle of people, but rather, and most immediately, to promote one's career. To write an essay was to lay claim to status among the ranks of the learned, to announce that one's credentials were on display and awaiting acceptance. When the proffered work was read, quoted, studied, copied or taught to others, or made the subject of a commentary, abridgement or explanatory glosses, this served to confirm

¹¹⁶ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, pp. 297–8).

¹¹⁷ Cited in Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, vol. IV, p. 339. The fact that this verse is not to be found in any of al-Maʿarrī's own works has provoked a controversy, primarily among Arab scholars, over the accuracy of its attribution to him and other matters; for an overview of the discussion see Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmiʿ fī akhbār Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-āthārihi*, ed. ʿAbd al-Hādī Hāshim, Damascus, 1382/1962–1384/1964, vol. II, pp. 196–201. Here we may but note that the verse's sarcastic attitude toward acrimonious bickering among the great monotheistic religions over outward religious observances is typical of al-Maʿarrī; see, for example, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, vol. I, pp. 186–7 no. 44 vs 7–10; vol. II, p. 27, no. 12.

¹¹⁸ In Yāqūt the name is erroneously read by Wüstenfeld as “Ibn Faqlān”.

¹¹⁹ Ghars al-Niʿma al-Ṣābiʿ, *Rabīʿ* (in al-Qifṭī, *Taʾrīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*, 298; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, IV, 339). Cf. al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, vol. I, p. 150 no. 131 v. 3; p. 320 no. 124 vs 3–4; p. 407 no. 98 v. 10.

the author's assertions of status and grant him a place within the community of scholars.¹²⁰ Ibn Buṭlān's actions followed this pattern exactly. He had no fundamental quarrel with al-Yabrūdī on his chosen subject; he simply selected this as an opportunity to affirm his position and seek a more expeditious confirming response than he deemed possible under the confining patronage of 'Alī ibn Riḍwān. His epistle does not so much move discussion of the problem forward as it displays its author's command of the writings of the ancients and his ability to argue logically, both of which were essential to any aspiring scholar of philosophy, medicine and the sciences.

But Ibn Buṭlān's training in Baghdad had not prepared him for dealing with sensitive situations, for recognising the delicate boundaries between patron and protegee, or for acknowledging and adapting to the powerful position of entrenched authority, and one can only conclude that he must have been almost entirely sheltered from such difficulties by the patronage of Ibn al-Ṭayyib in Baghdad. Once removed from familiar surroundings and placed beyond the protecting reach of his Baghdadi teachers, however, he soon ran into difficulty. His prospects in Aleppo seem to have been very favourable indeed until he humiliated Ibn Sharāra; a more politically minded individual would have realised that even though the governor had made helpful gestures toward him, it would be foolish to provoke someone who was in a position to incite fatal opposition to a newcomer's prospects for recognition and advancement. It is especially interesting to see that this lesson was not learned in Aleppo. Rather, the whole disastrous scenario was replayed on a larger and more damaging scale in Cairo when he dared to give offence to the cantankerous and powerful 'Alī ibn Riḍwān. And it may not have been just the field of medicine that gave him trouble. His physicians' dinner party, which metaphorically describes his travails at the hands of a self-serving elite of posturing incompetents in the medical field, has a possible counterpart in a similarly entitled work on a priests' dinner party (*Da'wat al-qusūs*).¹²¹ Unfortunately the text is lost, but the title itself is sufficient to suggest that this was a similar work, and hence possibly a forum for Ibn Buṭlān to vent his frustration at yet another circle in which his idealism and lack of political savvy did not serve him particularly well.

The dispute with Ibn Riḍwān leads us to the question of Ibn Buṭlān's sense of identity. Having left his native land as a young man, never

¹²⁰ Conrad, "Scholarship and Social Context", pp. 96–100.

¹²¹ Listed among his works in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā'*, vol. I, p. 243. The potential comparison between the two works was noted by Schacht in *ET*², vol. III, p. 741.

to return, how did he identify himself in such a culturally, spiritually and ethnically diverse world as that of medieval Islam? It certainly seems that he was able to move about freely and gain opportunities to secure his livelihood practically at will. The fact that part of Syria was under Byzantine rule in his day is hardly commented upon, and there is no reason to think that political and military strife between Byzantines, Fāṭimids, Mirdāsids and Marwānids hindered him in any way; this did not, for example, prevent him from journeying to Constantinople and finding support and employment there. He also crossed with apparent ease the lines dividing Muslims and Christians, and even different Christian confessions. He gained support and assistance from Muslim officials in both Syria and Egypt, and though a Nestorian he was able to gain a leading post in the Christian ecclesiastical establishment in Aleppo, where the Christian population was predominantly Monophysite and Armenian, and in Constantinople, where it seems extraordinary that his talents would have been sought for polemics against the Latins. In his long altercation with Ibn Riḍwān it is significant that while bitter personal abuse was the order of the day, the fact that Ibn Buṭlān was a Christian was not raised as a point against him. His adversary refers to this only once, to say that Ibn Buṭlān need not identify himself as a Christian since everyone knows this already;¹²² he passes on to other arguments and the matter is never raised again, or at least, not in the essays that survive today.

Ibn Buṭlān's Christian identity was certainly important to him. He frequently notes the number of churches in a town and comments on the situation of ecclesiastical and monastic life in its vicinity. We repeatedly see him turning to monastic communities, their needs engage him at length in his book on medicine for monks and monasteries, and he rejoices in the ambience of a flourishing countryside full of monasteries, hermits' cells and convents. Clearly he was happiest in Antioch, one of the leading Christian centres in Syria in the fifth/eleventh century; as noted above, the fact that Ibn al-Ṭayyib had come from Antioch may have been a factor in his favour.

A close reading of Ibn Buṭlān suggests that he was something of a free spirit. He never yearns for Baghdad, for example, and had he been more fortunate in Cairo he probably would have stayed there. He defends Baghdad when Ibn Riḍwān writes that the natural tendency of its land is to breed stupidity,¹²³ and he mentions his home town favourably again in the *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ*.¹²⁴ But in so far as extant works

¹²² *Medico-Philosophical Controversy*, p. 41 (text), p. 77 (trans.).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6 (text), pp. 89–90 (trans.).

¹²⁴ *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ*, pp. 5–7; trans. Klein-Franke, pp. 50–2.

allow us to judge, he was unmoved by any sentiment of *ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān* (yearning for the homelands). Travel and new environments excited and inspired him, and apart from his humiliating departure from Cairo he never seems to have regretted any decision to move on. The circumstances of his departure from Aleppo may have distressed him, but if they did he never speaks of the matter in any extant work.¹²⁵

It is also noteworthy that with the exception of his essay on the Eucharist he never refers to Near Eastern Christian confessional divisions, rivalries or polemics. This suggests that his Christian sense of identity was fairly undifferentiated, and this in turn may be related to his tolerant and open-minded attitude toward Islam. There is a tone of disapproval in his accounts of how the Islamic call to prayer must in one place be performed in secret, and in another is deliberately and systematically interrupted by the Christians beating on their *nawāqīs*. In Jaffa, Ibn Buṭlān's concern at the lack of a schoolmaster to teach the boys is of interest. Jaffa seems to have been largely a Muslim town by the fifth/eleventh century,¹²⁶ and in any case, since Christian boys would have been taught by the local priest or a monk, our traveller's reference to the lack of a schoolmaster seems to refer to the education of Muslim children, who would have been learning Arabic and memorising the Qur'ān.

Ibn Buṭlān's sense of personal confessional identity thus parallels his professional attitude. Though possessed of his own firm convictions in both spheres, this does not oblige him to deny the existence or legitimacy of other points of view. A fairly liberal perspective on his part would in fact help to explain his friendship with the famous poet al-Ma'arrī during the last years of the latter's life.¹²⁷ He held him in high esteem, and one source reports that he was quite distressed to find that al-Ma'arrī's declining health was affecting his intellectual abilities.¹²⁸ But Ibn Buṭlān could hardly have been comfortable with the

¹²⁵ But one might wonder if the *Da'wat al-qusūs* dealt with this episode.

¹²⁶ So I conclude from Amikam El'ad, "The Coastal Cities of Palestine during the Early Middle Ages", *Jerusalem Cathedra* 2, 1982, pp. 156, 157, 159, referring to the town's defences and mosque, its status as a centre for the ransoming of captives from the Byzantines, and its scholars of *ḥadīth*. Cf. also Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine: 634–1099*, trans. Ethel Broido, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 219–20.

¹²⁷ Cf. the comments on al-Ma'arrī in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of Travels*, pp. 11–12; he knew quite a bit about the poet but does not seem to have met him.

¹²⁸ Ibn al-'Adīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab*, vol. II, p. 910. This may, however, be a legend. After al-Ma'arrī's death there gradually arose an enormous corpus of legendary lore about his formidable memory and capacity for instant and precise recall, the loss of which a friend would naturally be expected to lament and take as a sign that the end was nigh. What is significant is not the tale itself, then, but rather the fact that Ibn Buṭlān's name was selected to play the role of the concerned professional colleague.

poet's well-known negative views of positive religion in general, much less al-Ma'arrī's harsh observations on Ibn Buṭlān's own faith. The conversion of a 30-year-old Muslim friend to Christianity, for example, provoked al-Ma'arrī to compose a long poem in which he portrayed Christianity as a barren creed doomed to come to an ignominious end. It was a religion inclined to ostentation and the working of tricks and false prayers in the guise of religious services, and by drinking the sacramental wine converts consumed their own destruction.¹²⁹ Elsewhere he complains that the old covenants between the faiths have disintegrated, so that many a Muslim now seeks the intercession of a Christian or Jew (*mu'āhid*).¹³⁰ The clamour for money drowns out calls for adherence to true religion; collection of the *jizya* has lapsed, and Muslims rise in the morning to find a church standing next to their mosque.¹³¹ Al-Ma'arrī, in other words, reacts very bitterly to many of the same aspects of Christian religious life about which Ibn Buṭlān writes with such enthusiasm and elegance.

Interestingly, these attitudes both account for and are explained by the fact that Ibn Buṭlān appears to have identified himself primarily as an Arab scholar. He must have known both Syriac and Greek, which of course facilitated his travels, but he always wrote in Arabic and did so very well. His intellectual and cultural patrimony included not only the Christian heritage and the legacy of classical Greek learning, but also extended to the great Arab poets of ancient Arabia and the renowned *udabā'* of early Islamic times. He was something of a poet himself,¹³² and the poetic heritage of Arabic literature was a major interest for him. He was sufficiently familiar with the 'Abbāsid poet al-Buḥturī (d. 284/897), for example, to know that he sings of his lover 'Alwa in his verse; in Aleppo, then, Ibn Buṭlān was pleased to discover her house.¹³³ Aleppo was of course not lacking in poets in Ibn Buṭlān's own day, and upon these too he comments in favourable terms with selections from their verse.¹³⁴

When he writes about the interesting places through which he passed, he of course reflects his interests as a Christian; but he communicates in much the same manner and style as such earlier Muslim geographers

¹²⁹ Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, vol. II, pp. 99–101 no. 41.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 320 *ult.*, no. 124, v. 5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 22 no. 6.

¹³² Abū Dharr al-Ḥalabī, *Kunūz al-dhahab* (in al-Tabbākh, *Flām al-nubalā'*, vol. IV, p. 186).

¹³³ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Šābi', *Rabī'* (in al-Qifī, *Ta'rīkh al-ḥukamā'*, p. 296; Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 307).

¹³⁴ Ghars al-Ni'ma al-Šābi', *Rabī'* (in Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, vol. II, p. 307).

as al-Muqaddasī (wr. c. 375/985),¹³⁵ and does so in the missives sent back to Baghdad to his Muslim colleague Hilāl al-Šābiʿ. Certainly his willingness—and even enthusiasm—to provide these materials cannot be seen as self-serving, since he never seems to have contemplated a return to Baghdad. When he laments the losses that scholarship had suffered in recent decades due to epidemics in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, his list of those who had perished includes, in addition to his friend Hilāl al-Šābiʿ, the Shīʿī theologian al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), the Ḥanafī jurist al-Qudūrī (d. 428/1036), the famous jurist and writer on politics al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), the mathematician and astronomer Ibn al-Haytham (d. c. 430/1039), the physician Šāʿid ibn Bishr (fl. 5th/11th c.),¹³⁶ the grammarian al-Rubʿī (d. 420/1029), and al-Maʿarrī. Most of the men he names were Muslims, and they seem to comprise a list of deceased personal friends. His close contacts with al-Maʿarrī have been mentioned above, and the careers of all of these scholars fit with the known patterns of Ibn Buṭlān's travels. 'With their deaths,' he laments, 'the light of scholarship has been extinguished and minds have been left in darkness.'¹³⁷ Looking back on a life in which he had never married or fathered children, however, he penned some verse on the personal cost of a life so completely devoted to scholarly pursuits in various climes:

When I should die and go to my grave,
No one will mourn or my vigil keep,
Save my medical comrades and books:
All of these will be left to weep.¹³⁸

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that while affairs of Christian life in the Near East were important to Ibn Buṭlān, he regarded them as belonging to a broader context relevant to all Arab scholars.

So—a remarkable career, certainly; and indeed, a remarkable individual. But is it reasonable to see some broader paradigm in all this? It could be argued, for example, that medicine was atypically ecu-

¹³⁵ Al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī maʿrifat al-aqālīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1877. The text has been translated by B. A. Collins, *Al-Muqaddasī: The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, Reading, 1994.

¹³⁶ This is Abū Maṣṣūr Šāʿid ibn Bishr ibn ʿAbdūs, a little-known hospital phlebotomist in Baghdad who eventually achieved a considerable local reputation as a physician. Ibn Buṭlān knew him and speaks of him in his *Maqāla fī ʿilla naql al-aṭibbāʾ al-mahara tadbīr akthar al-amrāq allatī kānat tuʿālaju qadīman bi-al-adwiya al-ḥarra ilā tadbīr al-mubarrid*. . . , which was known to Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa but has since been lost. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. I, pp. 232–3, 243; *GCAL*, vol. II, p. 195.

¹³⁷ Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, vol. I, pp. 242–3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 243.

menical in terms of opportunities of access for Christians and Jews. But medicine was the arena for Ibn Buṭlān's two great setbacks, first in Aleppo and then again in Cairo. Observers of his own and later times gossiped over his bitter public exchanges with Ibn Riḍwān, but what they admired and especially remembered was his literary masterpiece, the *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ*, manuscripts of which they adorned with beautiful miniatures in the same way that copies of the later *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) were treated.¹³⁹ Also esteemed were his missives to Hilāl al-Šābiʿ, which, as we have seen, made their way into a variety of works by later authors.

More important than what Ibn Buṭlān thought and did, I would suggest, is the fact that the cultural and social environment of the medieval Near East could produce such an individual, and, of course, many others whose careers are not displayed to us in such detail. His career highlights the profound unifying power of both the Arabic language and the pedagogical and intellectual structures that determined the course of culture in the Islamic world.

¹³⁹ The miniatures from the MS of the *Daʿwat al-aṭibbāʾ* in the L. A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Arts (Jerusalem) are reproduced in Klein-Franke, *Ärztebankett*. Others are included in *La médecine au temps des califes*, pp. 12, 14, 17, 69, 76. On al-Ḥarīrī see O. Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqāmāt*, Chicago, 1984.

THE ARMENIAN INTERMEZZO IN *BILĀD AL-SHĀM*
BETWEEN THE FOURTH/TENTH AND
SIXTH/TWELFTH CENTURIES

Seta B. Dadoyan

The symbolic beginning of what this paper describes as the 'Armenian Intermezzo' in al-Shām is the termination of Arab rule over Armenia and the establishment of the Bagratuni dynasty in 273/886. Its end is the year 595/1198, when the last great Rubinian prince, Levon II, became the first king of the fourth Armenian dynasty in Cilicia. Our main objective is to reconstruct and analyse this most important though least studied phase in Islamic-Armenian relations as a historic singularity. For this period not only links and combines otherwise isolated and floating data in the history of the region, but also contains the historical models which are necessary for the understanding of Islamic-Armenian history in Asia Minor, al-Shām and Egypt.

The Armenian Exodus to the West and South

The single most important factor which caused the migration of Armenians towards Muslim territories was the decision of the Byzantine emperor Basil I the Macedonian (867–86), himself of Armenian descent, to recover the eastern lands lost to the Arabs almost two centuries earlier. After successive military operations, the *theme* of Mesopotamia, which was organized between the years 286/899 and 300/912 during the reign of Leo VI (886–912), became entirely Armenian.¹ As the bulk of the nation gathered between the Muslim east and Byzantine west, militant factions in different localities claimed, or were allowed, powers by both the Arabs and the Greeks. For a century and a half from 253/867, Byzantine emperors (every one of whom was either completely or partially Armenian)² pursued a policy of expansion to the east and forced the migration of large numbers of Armenians.

The weakening of the Arabs by the middle of the fourth/tenth century greatly assisted the return of the Greeks. Antioch fell, says Michael

¹ P. Charanis, *The Armenians in the Byzantine Empire*, Lisbon, 1963, pp. 28–30.

² Charanis, *The Armenians*, p. 39. There were over forty Byzantine Emperors of Armenian descent, in addition to great numbers in the army and administration.

the Syrian, because the Arabs were afraid and put up no resistance. Syria and Palestine were abandoned in turn. Edessa was besieged in 331/942, Samosata was lost in 347/958 and the Hamdanids withdrew to Aleppo.³ As Melitene, Arzn al-Rūm, Mush and other cities abandoned by the Arabs were annexed to the empire, Armenians were systematically settled in them.⁴ According to Ibn al-‘Adīm, in 352/963 Nicephoros Phocas occupied ‘Ayn Zarba, Dalūk, Adhana and the other *thughūr* of al-Shām. Two years later in 354/965, Mašīša, Mar‘ash and Tarsus fell and by 359/969 the Greeks had reached Lake Van and the Tigris, and Antioch, Kafartāb, Shayzar, Ḥamāh, Jabla and Ma‘arrat al-Nu‘mān in al-Shām.⁵ Following the advice of his Armenian army commander, the emperor John Tzimiskes ejected the Arab population and replaced them with Armenians, with the intention of converting the latter to Byzantine Orthodoxy away from their homeland.⁶ Tzimiskes, who was himself an Armenian from the village of Chemeshkazak near Ḥanzīt in Fourth Armenia, had followed a similar policy when he was still a general.⁷ Between 354/965 and 359/969 he had settled his compatriots in the province of Sivās and the fortresses of the Euphrates.⁸ Now after ascending the throne he addressed a long epistle to the Bagratuni king in 364–5/974–5,⁹ in which he mentions settling Armenians in the occupied lands. It is believed that the Armenian troops provided in response by the Bagratuni king and the Armenian nobility populated these military colonies. But many of them refused to follow Byzantine Orthodoxy and the revolt of Bardas Skleros the Armenian in 366/976 was a ‘national revolt’.¹⁰

³ *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, Patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche*, ed. J. B. Chabot, vol. III, Paris, 1963, p. 123.

⁴ Charanis, *The Armenians*, pp. 30–1. Melitene was annexed in 323/934, Arzn al-Rūm (Erzurum, Karin or Theodosiopolis) in 338/949, Mush and the province of Taron in 359/969, etc.

⁵ Ibn al-‘Adīm, Kamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Qāsim b. Aḥmad b. Hibat Allāh, *Ẓubdat al-Ḥalab min tārikh Ḥalab*, ed. Sāmī al-Dahhān, Damascus 1951, vol. I, pp. 141–4.

⁶ A. Alboyajian, *Batmutyun Hay Gaghtakanutyun*, (*History of Armenian Emigrations*), vol. II, Cairo, 1955, p. 402. Nicephorus Phocas's daughter Maria was the first wife of John Tzimiskes before he became emperor (Charanis, *The Armenians*, p. 37).

⁷ Matthew of Edessa (or Matteos Urhayetsi), *Jamanakagrutun (Chronicle)*, trans. H. Bartikyan, Yerevan, 1973, pp. 12–13.

⁸ Alboyajian, *History*, vol. I, p. 250. On pp. 254–5 he lists 45 Armenian emperors in Byzantium who reigned between the years 610 and 1056, almost three quarters of the total.

⁹ Matthew, *Chronicle*, pp. 13–19. Addressing king Ashot as his ‘spiritual son’, a statement of Byzantine suzerainty over Armenia, and the ‘Shāhanshāh of Greater Hayk’, he cites his conquests in a crusader spirit and style. It is in this letter that we find the term Shām for the only time in the *Chronicle* of Matthew.

¹⁰ Charanis, *The Armenians*, p. 34.

Basil II (976–1025), also of Armenian descent, put an effective end to the Bagratuni dynasty much earlier than its official extinction in 437/1045. In the year 386/996, according to Ibn al-ʿAdīm,¹¹ he was in north Syria and recovered Aleppo from the Maghāriba troops of the Fāṭimids. In the year 390/999, he settled Armenians in the Syrian Shayzar and the valley of the Orontes.¹²

During his reign, the large-scale Armenian emigrations to the west and south started. Asoghik (Soghomon Taronetsi) says that the nation was scattered through Syria, and also Antioch and Ṭarsus in Cilicia.¹³ The communities grew so large that the Catholicos Khachik (361/971–382/992) established a bishopric in Antioch.¹⁴

For a while Basil II allowed the local Armenian princes some peace, but in 391/1000 he invaded Ṭarsus in Cilicia and began to annex the whole of Armenia to the Empire. The country was emptied of its national leadership and brave defenders, says Matthew, ‘eunuchs and foreigners took charge’ only to lose it to the barbaric tribes of Turks, the Seljuks. The latter penetrated into Vaspurakan around the year 408/1017.¹⁵

Confirming the above, Michael the Syrian says: ‘It was Basil who confiscated from the Armenians the lands of King Seneḡerim and gave him Sivās instead, and from that time the Armenians spread in Cappadocia, Cilicia and Syria.’¹⁶ During the fourth/tenth century, he adds, ‘when the Greeks were occupying cities in Armenia and Cappadocia, they started to draw great multitudes of [them] and settled them in other places [in Syria] where they flourished and prospered.’¹⁷ At the end of the fourth/tenth century, writes J. M. Laurent, the Armenians were acquiring lands west of the Euphrates, between the Taurus, Melitene, Sivās, Caesarea, Ṭarsus, north Syria and Edessa and the valley of the Orontes, becoming masters of these locations and creating a new homeland for themselves.¹⁸

¹¹ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Ẓubdat al-Halab*, vol. I, p. 199.

¹² Albovajan, *History*, vol. I, p. 241.

¹³ Charanis, *The Armenians*, p. 32.

¹⁴ Albovajan, *History*, vol. II, p. 403.

¹⁵ Matthew, *Chronicle*, pp. 31–3.

¹⁶ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 133. According to M. Canard, Basil II deported around fifteen thousand families from Vaspurakan in 1021 and 1022. Some of these settled in Cilicia, while others moved further south; see S. Poghosian and M. Katvalyan, “Kilikian Hayastan (Cilician Armenia)”, *Armenian Encyclopedia*, vol. V, Yerevan, 1979, p. 408.

¹⁷ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 198.

¹⁸ J. M. Laurent, *Byzance et les Turcs seldjoucides dans l’Asie occidentale jusqu’à 1081*, Paris, 1914, p. 67; Albovajan, *History*, vol. I, pp. 251–2.

In 437/1045 Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–55) expelled the last Bagratuni king, Gagik II, and annexed Armenia to the Byzantine Empire.¹⁹ Armenian nobles were moved to the west and the whole region was left open before the Turks,²⁰ the beginning of whose ascendancy in the area is put by both Michael the Syrian²¹ and Aristakes Lastivertsi²² at around 430/1038. Their first conquests were the cities which had become Armenian by that time.

The massive outflow of Arabs and the inflow of Armenians had led to the establishment of Armenian vassal rule in the vital fortresses of the Euphrates, *al-thughūr al-Shāmiyya*,²³ which attracted communities around them.²⁴ When the Turks arrived in these parts, the Armenians constituted the great majority of the population in the eastern border regions of the Byzantine Empire, in the valleys of the Euphrates and the Orontes, the two sides of the Taurus, Melitene, Sivās, Caesarea, Tarsus, North Syria and Edessa.²⁵ There were communities further south and west in villages around Antioch and Lattakieh, in Aramo, Ya'qūbiyya, Shughūr and Ghenamia.²⁶ About these communities and the Armenians in al-Shām in general, very little direct information is available.²⁷

The fall of Ani in 437/1045 and the Turkish victory at Manzikert in 464/1071 radically shifted the balance of power. Nevertheless, the capture of the area first by the Greeks and then by the Turks did not put a halt to Armenian political power in the region. This is a very vital issue which many historians seem to have overlooked, and which this chapter seeks to bring out. The chaotic conditions provided opportunities for the development of small but dynamic and flexible careers for the local warlords. C. Cahen sums up the situation as follows:

Never before had the Armenians played such a great part in the history of the Near East as they did at this most sombre moment in their history of national independence. Transported [there] as military colonies by

¹⁹ Leo, *Yerkeri Joghhoazu (Collected Works)*, vol. II, Yerevan, 1967, p. 681.

²⁰ Matthew, *Chronicle*, pp. 67–8.

²¹ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 158.

²² Aristakes Lastivertsi, *Patmut'yun (History)*, trans. with notes by V. Grigorian, Yerevan, 1971, pp. 38–40, 57 and ch. 19.

²³ J.M. Laurent, *L'Arménie entre Byzance et l'Islam depuis la conquête arabe jusqu'à 886*, Paris, 1919, pp. 4–5.

²⁴ Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, p. 404.

²⁵ Laurent, *Byzance et les Turcs seldjoucides*, p. 67; Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, p. 403.

²⁶ Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, p. 402.

²⁷ Artavazd Surmeyan, the author of the only study on the subject of the Armenians in Syria in later periods, finds nothing to say about the entire period of the fourth/tenth to sixth/twelfth centuries; see A. Surmeyan, *Patmut'yun Halā'pī Hayots-Surya (History of the Armenians of Aleppo-Syria)*, Aleppo, 1940, vol. I, p. 941.

Byzantium or having emigrated spontaneously to escape the Turkish invasions, they dispersed throughout Cappadocia, the Taurus and Cilicia; they were found in diverse locations of Diyār Moḍar, where Edessa was a semi-Armenian city, and so was Sevaverak. There were Armenians in all the towers and fortresses of the province of Tall Bāshir; in north Syria the Armenian colonies were known to have existed in Antioch, Lattakieh, Artāḥ Aphamia, Kafardubbīn and even in the plains. And from there, they spread in lesser numbers into southern Syria; a great many emigrated to Egypt, where the troops recruited by Badr al-Jamālī at the end of the eleventh century and his son al-Afḍal at the beginning of the twelfth century, Armenian converts to Islam, triumphed over the rebellious Negroes and Turks and halted the disintegration of Fāṭimid Egypt; [later on] we will find a non-converted Armenian vizier at the time of caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ.²⁸

He goes on to explain that it was this Armenian concentration in the Syro-Anatolian world and the middle Euphrates that became the subject of the epic poems of *Digenes Akrites* on the Byzantine side and *Dhū al-Himma* or *Sayyid Baṭṭāl* on the Muslim side.²⁹ The number of Armenians necessitated the establishment of new bishoprics in what were to become Frankish territories, in Samosata, Marʿash, Ṭarsus, Maṣṣā, Anazarva, Antioch, Lattakieh and Aphamia.³⁰

H. Gibb describes the 'complexity' of the period as something 'verging upon anarchy',³¹ with six distinct influences to be distinguished: the Fāṭimids, the local Arab tribes and princes, the Seljuk and Turkoman princes, the Turkish military officers, the independent non-Seljukid Turkoman tribes and the local urban militias or *Ahdāth*. Other militant factions such as the *Bāṭiniyya*, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs, the Nuṣayrīs, the Druze and the Maronites, he classifies under the 'general body of the population'. In the north (of al-Shām), in 'the foothills of the Taurus and on the banks of the Euphrates both Kurds and Armenians had succeeded in founding several baronies and even more extensive principalities'. He also observes that in 'several, if not most, of the northern cities, Armenians formed the majority of the population',³² and that Armenians served in the Islamic armies as *askars* and *ghulāms* in the mounted guards in Syria and Egypt.³³ In a survey of the various factions and sects of the Islamic society of al-Shām in this period, Saʿīd

²⁸ C. Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord, à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*, Paris, 1940, pp. 184–5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³¹ H. A. R. Gibb, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusaders*, extracted and translated from Ibn al-Qalānīsī, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, London, 1932, introduction, p. 14.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

‘Āshūr also mentions the great numbers of Armenians among the *ghulāms*.³⁴ In general, he adds, ‘the Armenians were known for their constructive contribution to the Islamic community.’ The Banū Munqidh of Shayzar, in particular, seem to have been closely associated with the Armenians.³⁵

Armenian Principalities and Muslim-Armenian Powers

Armenian military and political power in al-Shām took two basic forms: Muslim-Armenian powers, and principalities which were autonomous states initially established or allowed to exist by Byzantium. At the time of the arrival of the Franks around 491/1097, there were four major Armenian principalities in the peripheral regions of al-Shām, ruled by Gogh Vasil in Kaysūm and Rabān, Philaretus in Mar‘ash, Gabriel in Melitene and Ṭoros in Edessa. There were also several other territorial lordships between the valleys of the Euphrates and Orontes, in Rawandan (just north of Killis), Andriun (near Mar‘ash), Zovk (south-east of Ḥanzit and Kharbert), Bīra (or Birejik on the Euphrates south of Qal‘at al-Rūm), Tall Bāshir (on the river Sājūr, south of Aynṭāb), Gargar (on the Euphrates, south-east of Melitene) and Banū Sumbul or Sambil or Samwil (just north of Samosata).³⁶ In addition, there were smaller tribal lands throughout the northern part of al-Shām.

Gogh Vasil and Philaretus

Only recently has the author been able to establish the relationship between the Ṭonrakians, who were persecuted and driven into Syria by Grigor Magistros Pahlavuni (443/1051 and 446/1054), and the phenomenal growth of the Armenian military factions in al-Shām. The link is a clan named the Bene Bazrik (or Vazrik or Gazrik), to which Gogh Vasil, son of Ghazarik or Ghazar, belonged. In an epistle addressed to the Syrian Patriarch, Magistros refers to a certain ‘red-haired dog Ghazar’ and six other Ṭonrakian heresiarchs.³⁷ This figure is very pos-

³⁴ See Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Fattāh ‘Āshūr, “Al-mujtama‘ al-islāmī fī bilād al-Shām fī ‘aṣr al-ḥurūb al-ṣalbiyya (Islamic Society in Bilād al-Shām during the Crusades)”, *Al-mu‘tamar al-dawli li-tārīkh bilād al-Shām fī al-jāmi‘a al-urduniyya*, Beirut, 1974, pp. 219–44. The sects concerned are the Kisirwān (Nuṣayrīs, ‘Alawīs, Shī‘īs), the Tanūkhīs, the Banū Ma‘an, the Shī‘īs of north Lebanon, the Shihābī Druze and the Bāḥinīs or Ismā‘īlīs.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁶ Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, pp. 13–19.

³⁷ It begins as follows: ‘Response to the letter of the Catholicos of the Syrians, [by Magistros] Duke of Vaspurakan and Taron, concerning the activities of the Manichaeans

sibly the Ghazarik mentioned in the Syrian sources, for Bar Hebraeus and Michael the Syrian both speak of the clan of Banū or Bene Ghazarik around the year 459/1066 in Claudia and Qubbos on the Euphrates south-east of Melitene. These were the exact contemporaries of the Muslim Armenian clan of the Banū Boghousag of Sevaverak (or Siberek), less than fifty kilometres to the south-east. Michael the Syrian uses the term 'brigand', a translation of the Armenian *gogh*, and relates that at this time some 'brigands of the Armenian race' pillaged the convent of Mar Bar Sauma. He relates that these 'brigands' 'revolted against the [Greek] emperors at the time of the invasion of the Turks' and, although they 'claimed to be Christians', they were nothing but 'ravenous wolves'.³⁸ These descriptions are close to references in Magistros, who repeatedly says that although the Tonrakians claimed to be 'true Christians', they were in fact nothing but dogs, a word commonly used in the Byzantine medieval sources to refer to the Paulician heretics.

According to Michael the Syrian, the 'brigands' of the Bene Ghazarik were active in many areas, though they eventually concentrated around Melitene. They established forts in the mountains, from which they pillaged the monasteries of Maḏīq, Mar Asyā, Beit Sahde, Marcus and the 'admirable' monastery of Sarjisiyya.³⁹ Acting in a way typical of Armenian sectarians, the Ghazarik 'spilled the holy oil; they shattered the remains of the saints Sergius and Bacchus and threw away the other relics of the monasteries and churches... and pretended ignorance as their excuse. But in fact they were liars and pagans at heart.' They also took money and animals from the villages of Singis (Shenje) and Maḏīq. In order to prevent them from doing further harm, 'the chiefs of Melitene... gave them portions of land in Qubbos and Claudia. Then they obtained certificates of ownership from the emperor, in accordance with which the four villages of the region were conceded to them, in exchange for peace in the region.' However, it seems that they grew even more audacious: 'they showed a hypocritical face to the [Muslim] chiefs and pillaged the unfortunate populace.' With 'devilish incitement Armenian brigands invaded the Monastery of Mar Bar Sauma' and killed the monks, and from there they conducted their activities against the surrounding villages.⁴⁰ In August 459/1066, when

from the Byzantine world, the remnants of the Tonrakians there, who went to the Catholicos of the Syrians in Amid, and tried to persuade him [in favour of their doctrines]. Inquiring about the matter, the latter wrote a letter to Grigor Magistros Arshakuni, and this is the reply.'

³⁸ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, pp. 162–4.

³⁹ Michael's editor, Chabot, explains that this was the 'Dayr Sargisiyyah al-Abiad', p. 162, n. 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–3.

the Seljuk invasion of Melitene became known, the Bene Ghazarik were among the population of Claudia when they escaped to the mountains of Mar Bar Sauma.⁴¹ Gogh Vasil son of Ghazarik appears for the first time in the context of these events, and later in joining in with the activities of Philaretus.⁴²

Philaretus was one of the most important figures of the fifth/eleventh century. He was active in the politics of al-Shām during the reigns of the emperor Romanus Diogenes (461/1068–464/1071) and Alp Arslan ‘Izz al-Dīn Muḥammad (455/1063–465/1072).⁴³ His family, known as Vrakhamios or Varajnnuni, was involved in the ‘exclusively Armenian’ revolt of Bardas Skleros in 366/976. At first a general in the army of Romanus Diogenes, Philaretus was to become the curopalate over vassal lands around Mar‘ash and between Claudia and Qubbos. After the defeat of Manzikert, when the Byzantines lost control over the area, he claimed mastery over the region he was supposed to govern, then expanded it from Melitene to Antioch, collaborating with such clans as the Bene Ghazarik and appointing vassal princes.⁴⁴

It is in the following passage in the *Chronicle* of Michael the Syrian that we find direct links between this figure and sectarian-related events: About fifty ‘Armenian brigands’ (whom we can with some certainty

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163–4.

⁴² This is not only the background of Gogh Vasil. For one can suggest at this point that many of the petty kingdoms which these ‘brigands’ and ‘renegades’ set up in al-Shām originated as a consequence of the Byzantine policy of deportations from Armenia. Armenians of unorthodox religious background who were already in the region settled in *al-thughūr al-Shāmiyya* or moved further south, a fact which Armenological and medieval studies of this period and region should take into serious consideration as new elements in the understanding of regional political culture.

In the fragmented and still obscure history of these times the figure of Gorg or Gevorg Shirakatsi or Anetsi (Ani is in the province of Shirak) should also be considered, not only because he is historically important, but also because he is significant as another ‘missing link’. He was one of the ‘pirates’ and ‘brigands’ who were active between the years 448/1056 and 459/1066 (Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, p. 417). Matthew relates that some Antiochenes, who in general hated Armenians, attacked Gorg Shirakatsi-Anetsi while he was visiting the city. They robbed him, and then humiliated him by cutting off his beard. It seems that these were not ordinary citizens but urban militia, because Matthew uses the term *beledis*, which is the equivalent of *ahl*, a term used for the Syrian *Aḥdāth*. Gorg was from the brigands of the Bene Ghazarik, and true to his background he returned with a force of fifty (or five hundred) Muslim or Turkish fighters and ‘occupied the whole province of Antioch’. He destroyed twelve villages which were the property of the Duke of Antioch, slaughtered his captives before the walls, and standing at the gates of the city asked the people of Antioch whether what he had done was worth his beard (Matthew, *Chronicle*, pp. 147–9).

⁴³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 168.

⁴⁴ N. Adontz, *Études Arméno-Byzantines*, Lisbonne, 1965, pp. 174–5.

consider fugitive Ṭonrakians), were carrying out raids in the region, taking advantage of the presence of the Seljuks. They met a young Armenian man named 'Philardus' from the village of Shirbaz near Mar'ash, and made him their chief because of his tough and robust character. They captured a fortress in the region of Cilicia and gathered a great number of Armenians around them. Gradually Philaretus and his associates took over many other Cilician fortresses. When news reached Constantinople, Romanus invited Philaretus to the city, gave him golden armour and proclaimed him *augustus*. He expanded his territory even further into Ṭarsus, Mopsuesta, Mar'ash, Kaysum, Ra'ban, Edessa and Anazarva, and eventually entered Antioch, from where he penetrated into the valley of Jihun and then to Melitene. Realising that he could not resist the Turks, he went to Baghdad and Khorasan and converted to Islam. But before he returned, the Turks occupied Antioch, so he withdrew to Mar'ash, where it is said that just before his death he converted back to Christianity.⁴⁵

According to Matthew of Edessa (the source of most Armenian historical information about this figure), Philaretus was raised by his uncle in the monastery of Kozeṛn in Ḥiṣn Manṣūr. However, he had then become 'neither Armenian nor Greek in faith', but 'the elder offspring of the devil, evil spirited, the corrupt precursor of the Antichrist, devilish, monstrous and immoral'. Taking advantage of the Emperor's leniency, he took control of the province and played a part in the murder of Ṭornik, son-in-law of Grigor Magistros in about 466/1073, and of other Armenian leading figures in Upper Mesopotamia.⁴⁶

One of Philaretus' ambitions was to be governor of Antioch, following at least two of his compatriots who had previously been granted this position by the Emperor Romanus Diogenes.⁴⁷ After the assassination of Vasak Pahlavuni in 470/1078 by a group of *hastats* (probably urban *Aḥdāthi*), Philaretus was 'invited' by the Armenians of the city, who preferred him over the Turks, and soon he claimed to be 'Duke of Antioch'.⁴⁸ He thereupon eliminated these *hastats*,⁴⁹ and less than a year later, the last Bagratuni king Gagik II was also assassinated in mysterious circumstances.

In 477/1084 Philaretus annexed Edessa to his state, but in the next year he lost Antioch to Sulaymān b. Qutulmush. Matthew explains that he saved the city from the local urban militiamen (with no further

⁴⁵ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 173.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁴⁷ Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, p. 406.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁴⁹ Matthew, *Chronicle*, p. 140.

elaboration), who claimed to be Greek in faith but were Muslim in word and deeds.⁵⁰

Philaretus was also notorious for his attempts to bring the Armenian catholicate into his state. When Catholicos Theodoros declined to go to Mar'ash, 'because it was within the Turkish territory', he ordered Bishop Poghos to be consecrated and in consequence, says Matthew, there were four independent *catholicoi* in the Armenian world; in 479/1085–480/1086, the number rose to six, two in Egypt and four in Armenia.⁵¹

The position of Philaretus in relation to his own compatriots was at once unique and controversial. Rejected by the Armenian establishment, which he virtually terrorized, but sought by his compatriots for his power, he created a safe haven between the Greeks and the Turks. He followed the faith of both, and still insisted on having the Armenian *catholicos* for his state. Indeed, his political style and vision mark the features of what can be called the Armenian *intermezzo* in *Bilād al-Shām*.

Philaretus died in 479/1086. Thereupon, many members of the Armenian nobility gathered around his closest associate Gogh Vasil, (most probably) the son of the 'red-haired dog Ghazar', to whom Philaretus had entrusted Kaysūm and Rabān in 475/1082. The result was that by 485/1092, Vasil also ruled over Mar'ash, Qal'at al-Rūm, Tall Bāshir, Bīra and other places.⁵²

After the incursion of the Crusaders in the sixth/twelfth century, the Armenian princes found themselves in an extremely precarious position. The example of Gogh Vasil is just one among many. He was able to maintain his position against the Turks, who had destroyed their own associate Philaretus, but failed to come to terms with the Crusaders. At first he assisted them against the Turks. For example, in 503/1109 he attacked the Shah-i Armen Suqmān al-Qutbī of Khlāt. But rivalries within his own circle and the involvement of the Franks weakened his position. He was betrayed by his brother Bagrat, who hoped to gain some of his brother's lands by siding with the Franks,⁵³ and he died in 506/1112. His sister's son Tēgha Vasil succeeded him, but only kept his position until the year 509/1115, when the Franks forced him out of Gogh Vasil's kingdom.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 150–2.

⁵² Alboyajian, *History*, vol. II, pp. 417–8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 419.

Gabriel in Melitene

The third major principality that came under Armenian control was Melitene, which had become an Armenian city after the Greeks expelled the Arabs and settled Armenians there. Gabriel, a controversial figure of renegade background, was installed there by Philaretus. After the latter's death in 479/1086 he placed himself under the sovereignty of the Muslim Armenian Dānishmands until 485/1092, and with their support became completely independent of Byzantium.⁵⁴

Ṭoros in Edessa

The fourth major principality was Edessa, another mainly Armenian area. This province was the target of Turkish attacks from the beginning, but after the battle of Manzikert in 464/1071 Philaretus appointed a certain Ṭoros governor over Edessa and Diyār Moḍar. He was a man of obscure background and scandalous conduct, like many of his counterparts. But as a subordinate of Philaretus and as just another figure who was expected to guard the eastern borders of the empire, Byzantium granted him the title Curopalate. Powerless to resist the Turkish attacks, however, Ṭoros withdrew to Melitene where Gabriel, his son-in-law, was governor. But in 487/1094 he was reinstated in his position by Tutush. When the latter died, Ṭoros went to Ruḍwān b. Tutush in Aleppo, where there were many Armenians in the *ʿaskar* of this governor fighting against the Franks. Like previously described phenomena, this is a model which helps to understand Islamic-Armenian history in al-Šām at this time.

Ṭoros managed to keep his position in Edessa until 490/1096.⁵⁵ C. Cahen's suggestion that his title 'the Old Man of the Mountain' suggests the possibility that other Armenian rulers in the region may also have used it, cannot be supported from elsewhere.⁵⁶ A more plausible hypothesis is that he had connections with the Bāḡinīs of Aleppo. In connection with this it may be no coincidence that Ṭoros was on very friendly terms with Tutush and his son Ruḍwān of Aleppo, who was known for his Bāṭinī (i.e. Ismāʿīlī) sympathies. The latter enlisted the militant *Aḥdāth* of the Ismāʿīlīs as his personal guard, and he allowed the sect to open missionary houses in his province, so that the Bāḡinīs became very active in north Syria. Himself a brigand or dissident of not too orthodox background, Ṭoros might have been welcome as a sympathizer to the Ismāʿīlīs, and as a factional leader and chieftain he

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 421–2.

⁵⁶ Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord*, p. 211.

could easily have borrowed from them the typically Ismāʿīlī phrase *shaykh al-jabal*, a title used for Sinān their leader in Syria. The almost certainly Ismāʿīlī education given to the fifth/eleventh century Ṭonrakian leaders—the *majūsī* astrologer-physicians—is repeatedly referred to by Magistros, Aristakes and others. So Ṭoros emerges as a possible link between the persecuted dissident Ṭonrakians and Armenian princes on the one hand, and the Irano-Islamic sects in Upper Mesopotamia and al-Shām on the other.

When the Franks arrived, Ṭoros invited them to come to Edessa where he adopted Baldwin as his 'spiritual son'—a pagan practice continued by both the Ismāʿīlīs and Armenian sectarians; it later became an institution among the Armenian Youth Brotherhoods and the *Futuwwa*. After the adoption ritual (a bizarre ceremony indeed) Baldwin became co-ruler of Edessa. The people of Edessa, who were mainly Armenian, despised Ṭoros, and with the connivance of Baldwin they killed him, an act, however, which they were soon to regret. For through marriage to the daughter of one of Ṭoros' successors, Baldwin enlarged his possessions by lands in the province of Jihun,⁵⁷ and then expelled his new father-in-law from his own city, so that by 492/1098 he was sole Lord of Edessa.⁵⁸ Eventually, the disillusioned Armenians of the city attempted to organize a rebellion against him and his arrogant knights, though the plot was discovered and violent reprisals followed.⁵⁹

Muslim-Armenian Powers and Other Phenomena in al-Shām

Perhaps the least investigated though most intriguing aspect of the history of Armenian political activities in al-Shām is the presence of Muslim Armenians there during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries. These can be listed as follows: the breakaway state of ʿAzīz al-Dawla in Aleppo (407/1016–413/1022); the Nāwikiyya (also known

⁵⁷ A. Bridge, *The Crusades*, London, 1980, pp. 84–5.

⁵⁸ Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord*, p. 211.

⁵⁹ The case of Gogh Vasil's brother, Bagrat, is another typical example of the Frankish-Armenian-Seljuk rivalry in al-Shām. Philaretus had appointed Bagrat as ruler of Rawandan, just north of Killis. He betrayed his brother, sided with the Franks against the Seljuks, and accompanied Baldwin in his campaign over Tall Bāshir in the hope of regaining control over the fortresses around Kaysūm, in Gogh Vasil's principality. 'The population being Armenian,' says Cahen, 'Baldwin had no difficulty in occupying Tall Bāshir and Rawandan.' But after a brief period there, the Franks tortured Bagrat to make him give it up, then with Armenian assistance again, and in particular that of Constantin of Gargar, the Franks attacked Samosata as well (*ibid.*, p. 210).

under different names, as stated below) (447/1055–471/1078) and the figures of Ibn Khān, the Amīr Ketrij-Arisighi (463/1070–1) and Aqsiz/Atsiz (463/1070–471/1078); the Dānishmand dynasty in Cappadocia (458/1065–561/1165); the Banū Boghousag in Siberek or Sevaverak (c. 432/1040–c. 597/1200); and the clan of the Banū Ruzzik.

The Breakaway State of ‘Azīz al-Dawla in Aleppo (407/1016–413/1022)

This phenomenon was the first of its kind in either Muslim-Armenian or Fāṭimid-Armenian history. An ‘intelligent and pious Armenian’,⁶⁰ al-Amīr ‘Azīz al-Dawla Abū Shujā‘ Fātik al-Wahīdī b. ‘Abdallāh al-Rūmī, was an ‘Armenian *ghulām*’ of Mangutakin al-‘Azīzī, the Fāṭimid governor of Damascus. He was ‘one of the most important Fāṭimid governors of Aleppo’,⁶¹ who at the extremities of the Fāṭimid caliphate and in close proximity to the Greeks sought an independent status between 407/1016 and 413/1022. He was able to maintain his border state by virtue of his geographical position and by continually shifting alliances with the Greeks and the local Arab tribes. In 411/1020, a short time before his disappearance, the Caliph al-Ḥākim sent troops to the dissident north. Immediately, ‘Azīz al-Dawla struck an agreement with the emperor Basil II, also an Armenian, to come to his rescue. Previously, in 385/995, Basil II had been in Aleppo when the city was besieged by Fāṭimid forces under Mangutakin.⁶² The Emperor had reached Marj al-Dibāj when news of the caliph al-Ḥākim’s death reached the north. ‘Azīz al-Dawla now cancelled the agreement and sought an alliance with the Banū Kilāb. The Greeks thereupon withdrew to Manzikert, the population of which fled to Aleppo. Ibn al-‘Adīm calls this great flight ‘*jaflat* ‘Azīz al-Dawla’.⁶³

Until the year 413/1022, ‘Azīz al-Dawla’s Aleppan principality flourished. Al-Ḥākim’s sister, Sitt al-Mulk, temporarily tolerated the shrewd governor, and in the name of the young Caliph al-Ẓāhir she even sent him a robe of honour, which was traditionally granted only to ‘valued members of the caliph’s entourage’.⁶⁴ In the spring of 413/1022, however, ‘Azīz was the victim of an assassination plot arranged by the Fāṭimid court and carried out by two of his favourite *ghulāms*, an Indian called Tuzun or Teedhun, and an Armenian known

⁶⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Iti‘āz al-ḥunafā’ bi-akhbār al-‘imma al-fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafā’*, ed. M. H. M. Aḥmad, Cairo, 1971, vol. II, p. 129.

⁶¹ Ibn al-Qalānisi, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, p. 117.

⁶² F. Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs, their History and Doctrines*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 183.

⁶³ Ibn al-‘Adīm, *Ẓubdat al-Halab*, vol. I, p. 219.

⁶⁴ P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fāṭimid Cairo*, New York, 1992, p. 30.

as Abū al-Najm Badr. Ibn al-ʿAdīm briefly relates that ʿAzīz al-Dawla was stabbed while asleep by the Indian *ghulām*, who in turn was killed by his accomplice Abū al-Najm Badr. In *Kunūz al-dhahab*, this youth is said to be ‘an Armenian *ghulām* and *mamlūk* of Mangutakin’.⁶⁵ In *The Fāṭimid Armenians* the present author has suggested the possibility of this young man being the Muslim Armenian Fāṭimid vizier Badr al-Jamālī.⁶⁶

The Nāwikiyya: Ibn Khān, Amīr Ketrij-Arisighi, Aqsiz/Atsiz

The history of a most fascinating yet obscure group known as the Nāwikiyya (or Bāwikiyya, Yārukiyya, Yāruqiyya, Yāwiqiyya, Awāqiyya, etc.), has never been studied in itself, but only referred to in the context of the early Turkoman or Ghuzz penetration into al-Shām. They were active there during the third quarter of the fifth/eleventh century, and the three figures around whom the discussion seems to revolve are Ibn Khān, Aqsiz or Atsiz, and a semi-legendary figure known as Amīr Ketrij-Arisighi.⁶⁷

The name of Amīr Ketrij is indeed the key to the history of this faction. *Ketrij* is a purely Armenian word which means ‘brave young man’, the equivalent of the Arabic *fatā*. And like the Arabic, *ketrij* became a technical term referring to members of youth organizations. The information available about them makes it possible to suggest that the Nāwikiyya were part of Armenian militant groups from the *akritic* regions who joined the Seljuks Tughril Beg and his brother Alp Arslan, and assumed Turkoman identity. What follows should provide some grounds for this thesis.

The route which the Turks followed to al-Shām was not through Iraq but through Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Seljuk leader Tughril Beg led the Oghuz or Ghuzz to Armenia, from where they spread into Anatolia, Iraq and al-Shām, where the Nāwikiyya were active between the years 447/1055 and 459/1066.⁶⁸ The Fāṭimids had lost control of northern Syria by 452/1060 and the Ghuzz found an opportunity to expand in the resulting power vacuum. The name of Ibn Khān appears in this period as their leader. He often acted in alliance

⁶⁵ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Ẓubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. I, pp. 219–20, n. 3. Al-Maqrīzī has a more elaborate account in *Itḥāz*, vol. II, pp. 129–31.

⁶⁶ S. Dadoyan, *The Fāṭimid Armenians*, Leiden, 1997, pp. 106–12.

⁶⁷ *Ketrij* became the technical term to refer to Armenian militant urban youth-brothers, the equivalent of the *fityān* in the Islamic world. Until the past century Armenian urban youth organizations were referred to as ‘Brotherhoods of the *Ketrij*’ (*Ketrijavorats Yeghbayrutyan*).

⁶⁸ Shākir Muṣṭafā, “Dukhūl al-Turk al-Ghuzz ilā al-Shām”, *Al-muʿtamar al-dawli li-tārīkh bilād al-Shām* [pp. 303–98], p. 343.

with one power against another, such as the Banū Mirdās, the Banū Kilāb, the *Ahdāth* of Aleppo, the desert Arabs of Banū Numayr and Banū Qurayz.⁶⁹ In 458/1065 the Mirdāsids were said to have given Ibn Khān an *iqṭāʿ* in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān, where he settled with his Nāwikīs for a while. Historians mention the distinctly disciplined nature of Ibn Khān's men.⁷⁰ Ibn Khān had relatives in al-Shām and a nephew (brother's son) among the Nāwikiyya who arrived in the south of al-Shām around 463/1070, called in by Badr al-Jamālī.⁷¹ In 462/1069, he was received by Ibn ʿAqīl of Tyre, but when he joined Muslim Armenian Badr al-Jamālī, then governor of Syria, who was besieging the city, Ibn ʿAqīl arranged his murder in retaliation.⁷²

There is very little information about the background of Ibn Khān, except his coming from Marwanid Diyār Moḍar,⁷³ and his being a Nāwikī.⁷⁴ His career in Syria was essentially that of the leader of a small mercenary group of mixed ethnic background and no great political ambitions. But it is through him and more important figures and episodes that we can build up a more comprehensive image of the Nāwikiyya in al-Shām as a group with very possibly Armenian sectarian connections. Furthermore, the so far obscure background of what are known as the 'Muslim Armenian' troops which Badr al-Jamālī took with him to Egypt, finds some explanation here.

Amīr Ketrij appears in Matthew of Edessa's *Chronicle* and other sources. His name is spelled as *Ketrij Arisighi* by Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Arisfi* by Ibn al-Bandarī, *Raysghin* by al-Lawandī, or *Azisghar*. In the Greek sources he is referred to as *Kriskos Skolos* or *Ariskono*, but most importantly he is often referred to as simply *Ketrij*.⁷⁵

The earliest mention of Ketrij-Arisighi goes back to the year 451/1059, when he took part in the operations against al-Basāsīrī.⁷⁶ He is said to have been married to a Seljuk princess, a certain Jawhar Khatun, the sister of Alp Arslan, who was killed by Melikshah when she tried to join her husband in Asia Minor in the year 466/1073.⁷⁷ After the death of Tughril Beg, Ketrij joined Alp Arslan. Later he is said to have travelled to Constantinople with a group of Nāwikīs who had Greek sympathies (no Turk or Arab would have these, except someone

⁶⁹ See Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Ṣubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. I, pp. 294–7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷² Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 346.

⁷³ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Ṣubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. I, p. 294.

⁷⁴ Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 349.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʾāt al-zaman*, Paris MS 1506, ff. 154v, 159r.

of *digenes* or twin-born background with double loyalties),⁷⁸ though according to Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, the Greeks refused to accept him because they suspected his motives. He must have returned to the east, but a little later he was in Constantinople again, this time as a hostage. He then simply vanishes from history.

In effect, his career can be understood as a more historic equivalent of the *Epic of Digenes Akrites*, which is supposed to be an account from earlier times in the same area. The followers of Ketrij remained in Anatolia for a while fighting the Greeks, but it seems that they failed to gain the confidence of the Turks, whom they despised anyway.⁷⁹ When an invitation came to serve the Fāṭimid governor Badr al-Jamālī, who may have been a compatriot, they moved south where they were employed to fight the desert tribes.⁸⁰ Both Matthew of Edessa⁸¹ and Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī suggest that there was a collaboration between Ketrij and the Armenians of Sivās against the pro-Byzantine nobility after the defeat of Manzikert.

The name of this figure, Ketrij, and the ambiguity of the term Nāwikiyya are additional indications of the Armenian background of this and other tribal factions such as the Banū Ghazarik and Banū Boghousag who eventually joined the Muslim powers and carved out a role for themselves in the region. In his questioning about the ethnic background of the Nāwikiyya, S. Muṣṭafā writes: 'They were a special sort of people [*sha'ab*] of the Turks and called themselves the Nāwikiyya. . . . The name does not appear in al-Kashgarī's *Dīwān* of the Turkish languages of this particular period, nor does it exist among the names of the Ghuzz tribes. It is sometimes written as al-Yāwikiyya. [We know that] they were on bad terms with the Seljuks and were distinct from the other Ghuzz-Seljuk tribes.'⁸² There were certainly two figures with this name, one of them a Khwārizmshāh and the other the Nāwikī Atsiz, the latter called both by the people of Damascus and by Matthew Aqsiz Ibn Awaq or Uwaq. Muṣṭafā wonders about possible links between the names Awaq, Nawuq and Yawuq, and suggests that these early Turkish arrivals in al-Shām were neither Seljuk nor Ghuzz, but may have been local factions fleeing from Seljuk domination in the north.⁸³ This opinion does indeed support our initial hypothesis about the Muslim-Armenian background of the Nāwikiyya.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, ff. 126v, 127r; see also Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 350.

⁷⁹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zaman*, f. 154v.

⁸⁰ Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 394, n. 152.

⁸¹ Matthew, *Chronicle*, pp. 131–2.

⁸² Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 349.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the name Awaq or Avag is a purely Armenian name and can serve as a lead to the etymology of the term.

The exact time and circumstances of the negotiations between Badr and the Nāwikiyya which brought them to al-Shām are not recorded. According to Muṣṭafā, in the year 462/1069 they were a familiar group in al-Shām. Ibn Khān was in the north, as we know, and in 462/1069, al-Qāḍī Ibn ‘Aqīl had sought his services in Tyre. They were also known to be an independent faction and followed no party or person in particular.⁸⁴

Ibn Khān's arrival with his men in 456/1053–4 and his settling on an *iqṭāʿ* near Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān marks the beginning of Nāwikī history in al-Shām. The position of Ibn Khān and his men on the route to the south in the buffer zone between the Mirdasids and the Fāṭimids allowed them freedom to move to Damascus with six thousand mounted men. Contacts were made with the Fāṭimids while they were in Anatolia, upon which their move to al-Shām started through al-Jazīra, away from the Byzantine controlled passages. It seems that they were somewhere between the south of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān and Ḥimṣ, probably Qalamūn and east of Rastan (Salamieh?). These lands were given to them by Badr himself as *iqṭāʿ* on the borders of the desert to control the Arab tribes.⁸⁵ Badr resorted to the Nāwikī mercenaries because he had lost all hope of receiving any assistance from the caliph al-Mustanṣir, who was caught in civil war, plague and famine, or what al-Maqrīzī calls *al-shidda al-mustanṣiriyya*.

Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī has the following version of the episode: ‘From the year 462/1069, and perhaps earlier, Badr al-Jamālī, the Fāṭimid *wālī* of al-Shām, sent messages to some Turkoman factions established in al-Rūm and asked them to come to al-Shām to assist him in driving the bedouin Arabs from the urban areas and cities.’⁸⁶ Of their leaders he mentions Qaralu, Atsiz, Shakli, Jawli and al-Maʿmūn. They had a force of ten to twelve thousand mounted warriors as an independent militia and were given an *iqṭāʿ* by Badr on the borders of the Syrian Desert as ‘watch dogs’ and ‘worthy matches to the bedouin invaders of the urban regions in the west’.⁸⁷

The enmity between the Nāwikiyya factions and the Seljuks was another factor which probably contributed to Badr's choice of these dangerous militant factions, because he himself had lost the north of al-Shām to the Turks. The Nāwikiyya first fought the bedouins, but

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

⁸⁶ Sibt Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mirʿāt al-zaman*, ff. 134v–135r.

⁸⁷ Muṣṭafā, “Dukhūl”, p. 351.

soon they started supporting the rebellions against the Fāṭimids in al-Shām, assisting al-Qāḍī Ibn 'Aqīl of Tyre. But between 462/1070 and 463/1071, at least, they fought alongside Badr, after which a group led by Aqsiz Ibn Awaq separated.⁸⁸

The Awaq clan felt they deserved the land they had conquered with their swords and settled in al-Ṭabariyya.⁸⁹ Some, like Qaralu, remained loyal to Badr and stayed on their *iqṭā'* in central Syria. Aqsiz, his brother, became the founder of an independent state in Palestine and south Syria.⁹⁰ 'It was in the year 463,' says Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, 'that Atsiz Ibn Awaq, *muqaddam al-atrāk al-Ghuzz*, appeared and conquered al-Ramla and Jerusalem and put pressure on Damascus.'⁹¹ His *mamlaka* lasted from 463/1070 to 471/1078. Little else is known of this man, called Atsiz ('horseless' or 'nameless' in Turkish) or Aqsiz ('unjust', 'unmagnanimous' in Turkish).

The Nāwikīs thus became another force in the south of al-Shām and soon invaded Fāṭimid territories from Damascus to Palestine. Badr tried to shift alliances and used some of the Arab tribes against the Nāwikīs, but these tribes were defeated and withdrew.⁹² Aqsiz occupied Ḥiṣn 'Ammān in al-Balqā and the town of al-Ramla.⁹³

What deserves attention is that from the start Aqsiz acted with the clear intention of founding a state in Palestine and south Syria. Indeed, as Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī says, 'It is strange to find the Nāwikīs soon acting like responsible and true rulers of the land. They concentrated on providing security and food for the population and worked at ensuring financial resources and taxes for the sustenance of the state and the army. They brought peasants into al-Ramla, which was destroyed by the earthquake of 460/1068, and reconstructed it; they planted olive trees, and the Nāwikī Sultan took only one third of the profit.'⁹⁴

Essentially, the Nāwikīs acted independently and their foreign policy pursued one objective: survival between the two rival Islamic caliphates of the Fāṭimids and the 'Abbāsids. On the one hand, they mentioned the name of the Seljuk Sultan in their *khuṭba*, and on the other, they sought the protection of Badr al-Jamālī and the Fāṭimid Caliphate, in whose lands they had settled. When in 465/1072 Aqsiz entered Jerusalem, he wrote to the Seljuk Sultan in Baghdad that he

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁸⁹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zaman*, f. 135v; see also Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 352.

⁹⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Muqaffā'*, Salamiyya MS f. 242r.

⁹¹ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zaman*, f. 135v.

⁹² *Ibid.*, ff. 134r-v.

⁹³ Muṣṭafā, "Dukhūl", p. 359.

⁹⁴ Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-zaman*, f. 134v.

had freed the Holy City and expressed his commitment to re-establish 'Abbāsid rule there. When Badr completely withdrew to Egypt in 466/1074, the Seljuks seem to have seriously considered occupying al-Shām. They started penetrating it both from the north and Egypt.⁹⁵

In 468/1076, the state of Aqsiz stretched inland from Ḥimṣ to Palestine, while the coast remained under the Fātimids. He ruled in the name of the Seljuks and in the summer of 468/1076 entered Damascus after several attempts.⁹⁶ In October of the same year he collected all his forces and marched towards Egypt, but was defeated near Cairo, and when he returned to Palestine, he faced popular discontent. At the same time in 470/1077, Tutush moved against al-Shām on orders from his brother Melikshah. In 472/1079 Badr sent a huge army led by Naṣr al-Dawla to Damascus, while Tutush reached Marj 'Adhrā' north-east of Damascus in Rabī' al-Ākhir 472/October 1079. Shortly afterwards, the city and the whole of al-Shām fell to the Great Seljuks.⁹⁷

It must be noted at this point that the Palestinian state of Aqsiz was contemporary with that of Philaretus in the north and with the beginnings of Badr's power in Egypt. It is not at all strange to see the Nāwikīs sharing the same ambition for and the success in setting up their own land wherever they found the possibility. In conclusion to this initial brief study of the Nāwikiyya, we may suggest the possibility that the term itself may be the transliterated and distorted form of 'Paulician', as 'Bawiki' or 'Bawghiki-Pavghikian'. The Arabs called the Paulicians *Bayālika*, *Baylakānī*, hence the city of *Baylakān*, a location in Azerbaijan where many of this sect had settled.

The Dānishmand dynasty in Cappadocia (447/1055–569/1173)

This is another example of a Muslim-Armenian power which appeared on the stage of eastern Anatolia in Turkish attire. The Dānishmandid Amīrs⁹⁸ were the descendants of a prominent Armenian family from Georgia, the Baghwashi-Liparitians. In the histories of the Seljuks and Crusaders they are presented as a 'Turkish power' in Asia Minor, and Cappadocia in particular. 'Whilst the Seljuks were extending their empire in Asia Minor,' says S. Lane-Poole, 'another Turkish chief, Gumishtigīn, son of Dānishmand, established his power in Cappadocia over the cities of Sivās (Sebaste), Qaysariyya (Caesarea) and Malaṭiya (Melitene), near which last place he inflicted a sanguinary defeat upon

⁹⁵ Mustafā, "Dukhūl", p. 363.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 381–2.

⁹⁸ *Dānishmand* means 'teacher', 'instructor' in Persian.

the Franks. His successors played a distinguished part in the war of the Crusades, but the dynasty was absorbed into its greater Seljuk neighbour.' In all there were five Dānishmandid rulers.⁹⁹

The Banū Boghousag

The history of the Banū Boghousag (c. 432/1040–c. 597/1200) in Siberek (or Sevaverak meaning 'black ruins'), a mainly Armenian city, is a variation of this same theme of Muslim-Armenian territorial powers in Upper Mesopotamia on the peripheries of al-Shām but closely connected to it. In turn, this is a very little studied theme and is often referred to out of context. Michael the Syrian is the main source concerning this clan: 'In the fortress of Sibaberek . . . reigned some Armenians whose father, Boghousag, went to Baghdad at the beginning of the Turkish invasion; he even reached Khorasan and converted to Islam. He obtained a certificate from the grand Sultan of the Turks and from the Caliph [according to which] the place [Sevaverak] became an inheritance to [him] and his descendants. This is the reason why they were all Muslims.'¹⁰⁰ Their career and relations with their Christian compatriots, the Seljuks and Franks, are themes of extreme importance and provide new insights for Near Eastern intercultural studies.

The clan of the Banū Ruzzīks

The Armenian-Nuṣayrī-Imāmī Banū Ruzzīks, the clan of the famous Fāṭimid vizier Talā'ī⁴ b. Ruzzīk in al-Shām (549/1154–557/1161), is indeed another link between al-Shām and Fāṭimid Egypt. It can be shown that the Ruzzīks were originally from the city of Vostan (often referred to as *Basatīn* or *Bustān*, the synonym of the Armenian Vostan, i.e., garden, orchard). Only recently has the author found a record of their route to Egypt in Ibn al-Qalānisi's *Damascus Chronicle*. In the year 506/1112, when Baldwin of Jerusalem realised that he had lost the opportunity to take Tyre, where Zāhir al-Dīn Atabek had replaced the Fāṭimid governor, he went to 'Akkā. While he was there, 'a man of the Arabs of Ruzzīk came to him from the town with a message that the Damascus caravan had left Boşra and was on its way to Egypt with a rich convoy. This man from 'Akkā offered to guide the Frank to it in return for the release of some of his tribesmen who had fallen captive to the Franks. Baldwin accepted the deal and at once set out from 'Akkā in pursuit of the caravan.' The caravan was looted, many

⁹⁹ See S. Lane-Poole, *The Mohammedan Dynasties*, Beirut, 1966, p. 156.

¹⁰⁰ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, pp. 247–8.

were killed, and the Franks got away with the money and goods.¹⁰¹ After the power and fame which the clan enjoyed in late Fāṭimid Egypt, and the assassination of the vizier Ruzzīk b. Ṭalāʿī in 558/1163, some of them fled back to Syria and settled near Salamieh, a traditionally Nizārī Ismāʿīlī area.

Armenians, Franks and Turks in the Sixth/Twelfth Century

The history of the Armenian communities and the militant factions in al-Shām during the sixth/twelfth century is accessible only in a very fragmentary form in the histories of the period. There were Armenians in Tall Bāshir, one of *al-thughūr al-Shāmiyya*, a prosperous and well fortified city a day's distance to the north of Aleppo¹⁰² and there are accounts of their raids over Jisr al-Ḥadīd and Ḥārim.¹⁰³ We know that some of the Pahlavunis were there and that the Fāṭimid vizier Bahrām al-Armanī was a native of Tall Bāshir.

In about 490/1097, before the arrival of the Franks, Antioch had a large Armenian community and many fought in the *ʿaskar* of the governor Yaghī Siyān.¹⁰⁴ There were also dense communities throughout the valleys of the Euphrates and the Orontes. In the story of the fall of Antioch in 491/1098 and the escape of Yaghī Siyān towards Rūj, he was said to have been attacked by some Armenians from nearby Armanaz. The *ghāb* of Rūj, which extends from north to south between Jabal Summāq in the east and Jabal Baḥra in the west, was full of Armenian communities. Artāḥ, between Antioch and Aleppo, was another major concentration, and so was Tall Minās. Ḥārim was also inhabited by Armenians and like most cities it had its militant youth organization. At the time of the siege of Antioch in 1098, the Franks spread south into the valley of Orontes, into ʿImm, Ḥārim and Artāḥ. When Muslim troops sought refuge in Ḥārim, the Franks followed them there. The Muslims, says Ibn al-ʿAdīm, were compelled to make for Aleppo, and the Armenian *ahl*, the militant youth organization, of Ḥārim took over the city. The term *ahl* is also used in reference to the men of Firūz the armourer in Antioch.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Qalānīsī, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, p. 130.

¹⁰² Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *ẓubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. II, p. 125.

¹⁰³ C. Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew, *Chronicle*, p. 173; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *ẓubdat al-Ḥalab*, pp. 133–4; Ibn al-Qalānīsī, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, p. 135; see also Bridge, *The Crusades*, pp. 94–5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *ẓubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. II, p. 132. There were similar militant urban youth organizations in the province of Aleppo, as the following episode, related by

It seems that in the province of Antioch, Armenians became more active when the cities and surrounding areas fell to the Franks. They took over 'Imm and Wannib, south of Artāḥ, when its people fled after the fall of Antioch.¹⁰⁶ Between Antioch, Rūj and Aleppo, whoever got away from the Franks was plundered or killed by the Armenians.¹⁰⁷

As we study these fragments, we realize that in the histories of al-Shām we encounter the expression 'Christian Armenians' or *Arman Naṣārā*. This identification may have been necessary at the time in view of the considerable number of non-Christian Armenians who were also active. On the other side, a Franco-Armenian cavalry was constantly involved in battles in the north west of al-Shām. Depending on circumstances in the various minor locations throughout the Euphrates, the alliances fluctuated. For example, Armenians in al-Bustān in the north gave their town to the Turks in 1105, while the Armenians of Artāḥ and 'Amūq collaborated with the Franks. Not far from these places, the atrocities of the Franks caused uprisings against them in 1104 in all the provinces east of Antioch where Armenians had lived for a long time. The Frankish garrisons were expelled from Ma'arrat Miṣrīn, Sarmīn, al-Bāra, Ṣurān, Laṭmīn, Kafartāb and Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān.¹⁰⁸ There are many episodes similar to the following found in Ibn al-Qalānisi: in the spring of 499/1105 Ruḍwān Ibn Tutush, lord of Aleppo, set out for Tripoli to assist Fakhr al-Mulk Ibn 'Ammār, who was besieged by the Franks. 'The Armenians who were in the fortress of Artāḥ surrendered it to him because of the injustice and grievous tyranny which they had suffered from the Franks.'¹⁰⁹

In the absence of a single central power and against the background of the history of the fifth/eleventh century, the political and national interests of the Armenians were localized. Thus, Baldwin of Edessa relied on the Armenians to defend the city against Turks,¹¹⁰ and in the year 503-4/1110, when Tancred was spreading his atrocities from Cilicia to Beirut, there were Armenian cavalymen in his troops from Antioch and Cilicia fighting against their compatriots among the Muslims.

Armenian-Frankish cooperation became an almost permanent policy of the Cilician princes and the Armenian aristocratic houses. With

Ibn al-ʿAdīm, shows: In the year 1098, some Armenians arrived in Tall Qabbāsīn (a village of Aleppo) on the side of the valley, and killed whoever was in it. After a counter attack that lasted two days, one thousand Armenian survivors were taken to Aleppo and executed there (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-8.

¹⁰⁸ C. Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord*, p. 239.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn al-Qalānisi, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

the exception of Mleh, the Armenian establishment—both religious and political—preferred the Christian powers to others, irrespective of their actual experience. The descendants of the Pahlavunis, such as the notorious Fāṭimid vizier Bahrām al-Armanī, maintained this alliance with the Crusaders and made no secret of their anti-Muslim feelings. At the time when the Armenians of Edessa were defending Edessa, where Baldwin was ruler, their master declared war against Tēgha Vasil, the adopted son and successor of Gogh Vasil of Kaysūm. The latter had married the daughter of Great Prince Levon, son of Ruben, in order to gain the support of the Rubinians against the Franks. His step-mother had been collaborating closely with the Muslims since the time of Gogh Vasil. In this conflict, his father-in-law Levon, who was an ally of the Franks, treacherously captured him and handed him over to Baldwin. Tēgha Vasil's power came to an end in 510/1116, the Franks moved in and Tēgha himself found refuge in Constantinople.¹¹¹ In the south, Armenians were fighting among the Frankish troops in the Lebanese Biqā' valley in the year 510/1116/7.¹¹² In Ascalon there were Armenians in the *askar* of the Fāṭimid governor Shāms al-Khilāfa, one of al-Afḍal's men.¹¹³

An almost completely unstudied theme is that of the Armenian *arevapashts*, or sunworshippers in Syria at this time. According to Matthew of Edessa, in the year 518/1124 Ortuqid Ballāk invaded Menbij. After capturing this fortress city and just as he was taking his armour off, says Matthew, he was shot by an arrow from an *arevapasht* in the fortress.¹¹⁴

These sunworshippers are also referred to as *tajiks*, i.e. Muslims, hence another indication of the Muslim-sectarian link. Some of the Armenian dissidents must have presented themselves as *shāmsiyya al-arman*. Militant *shāmsiyya al-arman* also appear in the episode of the murder of Amīr Bazwag, whose relations with Shihāb al-Dīn b. Būrī were strained. The latter plotted against him and killed him in the citadel of Damascus. According to Ibn al-Qalānisī:

On Monday 6 Sha'bān 533 (18 April 1138) Shihāb al-Dīn detailed a party of the Armenian *shāmsiyya* who were members of his entourage to deal with [Bazwag] and gave them instructions to kill him. When they found a favourable moment to overpower him in the absence of his attendants, they killed him and carried him out wrapped in a cloak to the tomb built for his wife; and he was buried there.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Matthew, *Chronicle*, p. 225.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240. On this subject see Dadoyan, *The Fāṭimid Armenians*.

¹¹⁵ Ibn al-Qalānisī, *Dhayl tārikh Dimashq*, p. 247.

Finally there is the case of the notorious (as far as Armenian historians are concerned) Rubinian Great Prince Mleh, or Mlīh in Arab sources, whose name is closely connected with Nūr al-Dīn Zangī. After much confusion, he succeeded his brother Ṭoros II as Great Prince of Cilicia. Mleh always 'rallied to the side of Nūr al-Dīn' and with the aid of the latter's troops took actual possession of Cilicia and was finally recognized by Manuel Comnenus, who was really his enemy. Obviously, Mleh's Muslim alliance would not possibly have been looked upon favourably by the Rubinians and orthodox Armenians. Mleh was killed in 1175 and his nephew Ruben III succeeded him.¹¹⁶ The first Cilician King was proclaimed in 1198, ending the phase of the Great Cilician Princes (1080–1198), of whom Mleh was the seventh and the only one who not only collaborated with the Muslims but also embraced their religion.

The career of this man is a matter of controversy and stands out from the texture of early Cilician history. Medieval Armenian historians present him in very unflattering terms, while in Arab histories he is known for his anti-Christian attitudes. In one place Michael the Syrian says, 'The king of Jerusalem, hearing that Mleh was causing harm to the Christians, marched to the north. Mleh took refuge among the Turks, who came to his assistance. There was a battle, Mleh and the Turks lost and Mleh gave up the fortress[?], repented and declared his submission to the Frankish king.'¹¹⁷ In the earlier years of his career, Mleh was still acting in accordance with the Rubinian policy of supporting the Franks. He participated in a battle near al-Ḥārim in the year 559/1164 on the side of the Frankish masters of Antioch and Tripoli. Ten thousand men lost their lives and nobody survived this massive defeat, except Mleh. 'It was said,' says Ibn al-ʿAdīm, 'that the Yāuqī [or Yāruqī, or Nāwikī etc.] released Mlīh Ibn Lawūn and allowed him to escape, because he was their uncle (*khālūhum*).'¹¹⁸ This strange and unstudied detail can be interpreted as the strongest indication of the Armenian background of the Yāruqīs or the Nāwikīs and the mysterious blood relation between them and Mleh. More importantly, the episode also stands as proof of the active role of the Nāwikīs in al-Shām as late as the sixth/twelfth century, a century after they appeared there with Ibn Khān and Aqsiz.

Ibn al-ʿAdīm refers to Mleh as *malik al-arman*:

'Nūr al-Dīn had Mlīh Ibn Lawūn, the king of the Armenians, in his service; he gave him territories (*aqṭaʿahu*) in the land of the Muslims and accompanied him in many wars, and he assisted him (*anjadahu*) in the

¹¹⁶ *EI*², vol. II, p. 37, art. "Cilicia".

¹¹⁷ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, vol. III, p. 344.

¹¹⁸ Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Ṣubdat al-Ḥalab*, vol. II, p. 320.

year [568/1173] with a group of his own soldiers. Mīḥ entered Adhana, Ṭarsus and al-Maṣīṣa and captured them from the Byzantine emperor. He then sent to Nūr al-Dīn a great quantity of the spoils and thirty of their leading citizens as captives.¹¹⁹

This major offensive supported by Nūr al-Dīn facilitated Mleh's efforts to drive the Byzantines back and establish Armenian sovereignty over Cilician lands until the proclamation of Prince Levon II as the first king in 1198. As a result Cilicia became the new homeland and attracted the scattered communities both from al-Shām and Ayyūbid Egypt, where they were persecuted harshly. By the seventh/thirteenth century a new phase of interactions started in Seljuk, then Mongol, Anatolia and the Armenian heartland, although no significant record (at least as far as the author's research has extended so far) is available concerning heterodox Armenian powers or elements in al-Shām during this later period. For example, we know little more than that the bishopric of Aleppo was established in the middle of the eighth/fourteenth century, when obviously there must have been a community large enough to require the church to take this measure.

The Armenian intermezzo in al-Shām forms the background of Armenian activities in north Syria in these later times, though this is only a small matter compared with the significance of the careers of the Armenians in the centuries reviewed in this chapter. Starting as cooperation between religious dissidents and the Arabs, the Muslim-Armenian political alliance was a major factor in the formation of such principalities as those of Philaretus, Gogh Vasil, the Banū Boghousag, the Dānishmands and even the state of the Rubinians of Cilicia. Different in details but in essence similar, these separate cases suggest new paradigms for the understanding of the history of the peoples of the Middle East. They reflect political visions beyond what is called 'national orthodoxy' in matters of culture and politics, thus linking the seemingly sectarian related careers of earlier periods to a whole new phase in the Islamic world.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 338.

LEAVES FROM AN ILLUSTRATED SYRIAC LECTIONARY OF THE SEVENTH/THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Lucy-Anne Hunt

One of the defining features of the cultural life of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages was the production and use of books, including service books. While Arabic was the language of everyday social and commercial activity, the indigenous languages were retained within the Christian communities themselves, if increasingly only for liturgical use. The history of the medieval illustrated Syriac book does not, however, reveal a beleaguered culture turning in on itself. Rather, the books that are preserved frequently display a form of illustration that demonstrates an awareness of both the secular art which was shared with the Islamic Arabic majority, and also the art of the various Christian communities. While the role of Syrian Christians in the transmission of Arabic scientific texts to the West is acknowledged, the thriving use and production of books in the religious sphere is less well-known. This may partly have to do with the scattered nature of the material: while several ecclesiastical libraries are still to be found within the former Syriac-speaking areas of present day Syria, Mesopotamia and eastern Turkey, many of the books that survive in the post-medieval period have been dispersed into collections elsewhere, particularly in Europe and North America. Of these, important questions still remain as to their original attribution and affiliations.

The purpose of this chapter is to draw attention to some little-studied parchment folios detached from a Syrian Orthodox ('Jacobite')¹ Syriac Lectionary in the Harklean version.² Written in estrangelo and illustrated, their readings are arranged according to the ecclesiastical year. Their imagery, likely positioning in the original manuscript, and the provenance of the Lectionary as a whole are matters for discussion.

¹ In his recent survey of the background to the Syrian Orthodox Church, S. Brock, "Syrian Christianity", in K. Parry, D. J. Melling, D. Brady, S. H. Griffith and J. F. Healey eds, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity*, Oxford, 1999, p. 467, refers to the terms 'Monophysite' and 'Jacobite' as 'misleading nicknames'.

² My thanks are due to Mr Sam Fogg for permission to study the leaves and reproduce them here, and to Dr Sebastian Brock for comment on the texts and for assistance with some of the plates.

Dateable to the seventh/thirteenth century, the period of the so-called 'Syrian Renaissance', they can be related both to other Syriac liturgical manuscripts and to secular Arab art. Demonstrating a cultural fusion characteristic of contemporary Arab Christianity shortly before the mid-seventh/thirteenth century, they can be attributed to a monastery in the Tūr 'Abdīn area near Melitene, perhaps Mār Ḥananiyya (Dayr al-Za'farān), and are a significant addition to the present state of knowledge of Syrian book production and illustration of the period of the Crusades.

While they have been mentioned in l'Abbé Jules Leroy's major study of illustrated Syriac manuscripts published in 1964, with three of the illustrations—the four evangelists, the Holy Women at the Tomb, and the Crucifixion—reproduced, the leaves have never been studied in depth.³ There were five known in 1964, when they were in the Kevorkian Collection in New York, but by the time they had been acquired by a private collector in London in 1987 one had been lost from the group.⁴

The preserved—if damaged—leaves will now be enumerated, in order to assist comment on the significance of their text and imagery. In each the text is written in estrangelo in black ink, with punctuation in orange-red, and key phrases in gold and gold outlined in red.

1. A complete parchment folio, measuring 42.3×33.3 cm, with 24 lines of text in two columns.⁵ The rulings have been guided by prickings in the margins down either side on the recto, hair side.

r) The *recto* (Fig. 1) has the reading for the Nativity, Luke 2.9–17a, with the words 'Praise to God in the Highest and on earth peace' in gold.

v) The *verso* (Fig. 2), has the text of Luke 2.17a–20. Two panels of interlace ornament have been added, with the lower one, which is later, incorporating the quire sign (*beth* = 2) at the bottom of the interlacing. The colours employed are red, orange, yellow, green, with white.

2. A fragmentary half-folio, now divided vertically, with a horizontal tear at lines 17/18, measuring maximum 40.00×17.1 cm.

r) The *recto* (Fig. 3) has the text of John 13.13–18, the reading for Thursday in Holy Week (the Footwashing).

v) On the *verso* (Fig. 4) is an illustration of the Last Supper.⁶ Part of the figure of Christ survives, seated cross-legged at the top of the

³ J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient* (Paris, 1964), pp. 411–13 with pl. 149 (1–3).

⁴ Sotheby's Sale Catalogue, *Western Manuscripts and Miniatures*, Tuesday, 24th June 1986, no. 130.

⁵ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriaques*, p. 411, no. a.

⁶ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriaques*, p. 412, no. c.

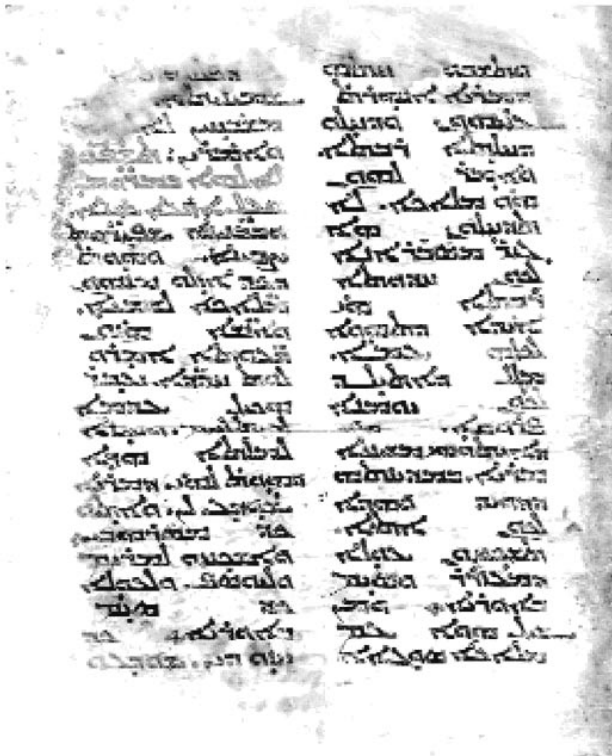


Fig. 1. *Leaf 1r. Text of Luke 2.9-17a (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)*

scene under a trilobe arch. Below the arch to the left is a lighted candle, a sign of ceremony and vigil. Beneath Christ is the end of a semi-circular table on which stand six plates and a roasted animal. Six apostles are ranged around the table, gesturing to the meal. One, presumably Simon Peter, is given prominence by his gilded halo. A broad range of colours is employed—orange, red, yellow, green, purple, brown, and black. The background was once green, for although it has now been almost entirely scraped off, a part remains encircling Christ's halo.

A starting point for discussion of this scene lies in a comparison with a scene in the Syriac lectionary, presently in the Vatican Library (Vat. Syr. 559), which was made at the monastery of Mār Mattai near Mosul in northern Mesopotamia in 1219–20 (Fig. 5), and the related London lectionary made either at the same monastery or an affiliated one, perhaps Mār Ḥananiyya (Dayr al-Zaʿfarān) near Mardīn, the seat of the



Fig. 2. Leaf Iv. Text of Luke 2.17a–20 (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)

Syrian Orthodox patriarchate.⁷ A similar format is used, with the semi-circular table, plates, and the roasted animal in place of the fish which appears in Byzantine art and more commonly elsewhere in eastern Christian art. The decorated arched background too reappears. Christ has been moved to the dominant central position in the London fragment, but the figure to the left of the scene, bearded, with heavy eye-

⁷ Vat. Syr. 559, f. 128r; Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques*, p. 292, with pl. 88 (4). London, B.L. Add. 7170, f. 139v; Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques*, p. 307 with pl. 88 (3) and suggestion of Mār Hananiyya, p. 313; exhibited in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261*, catalogue ed. H. C. Williams and W. D. Wixom, New York, 1997, p. 385.

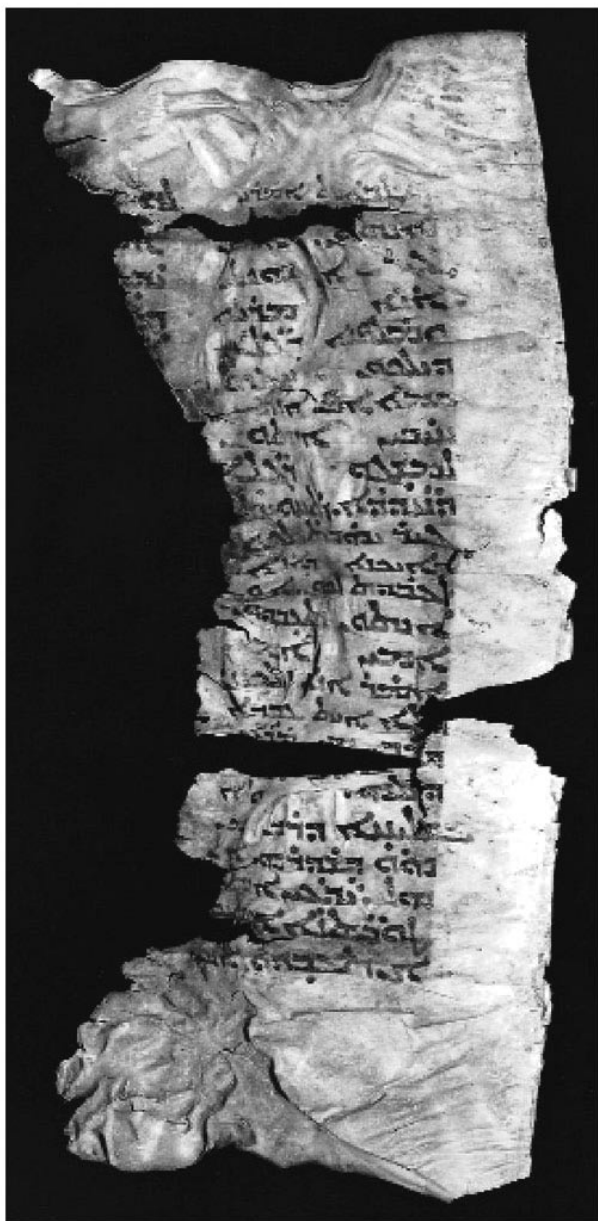


Fig. 3. *Leaf 2r. Text of John 13.13–18 (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)*

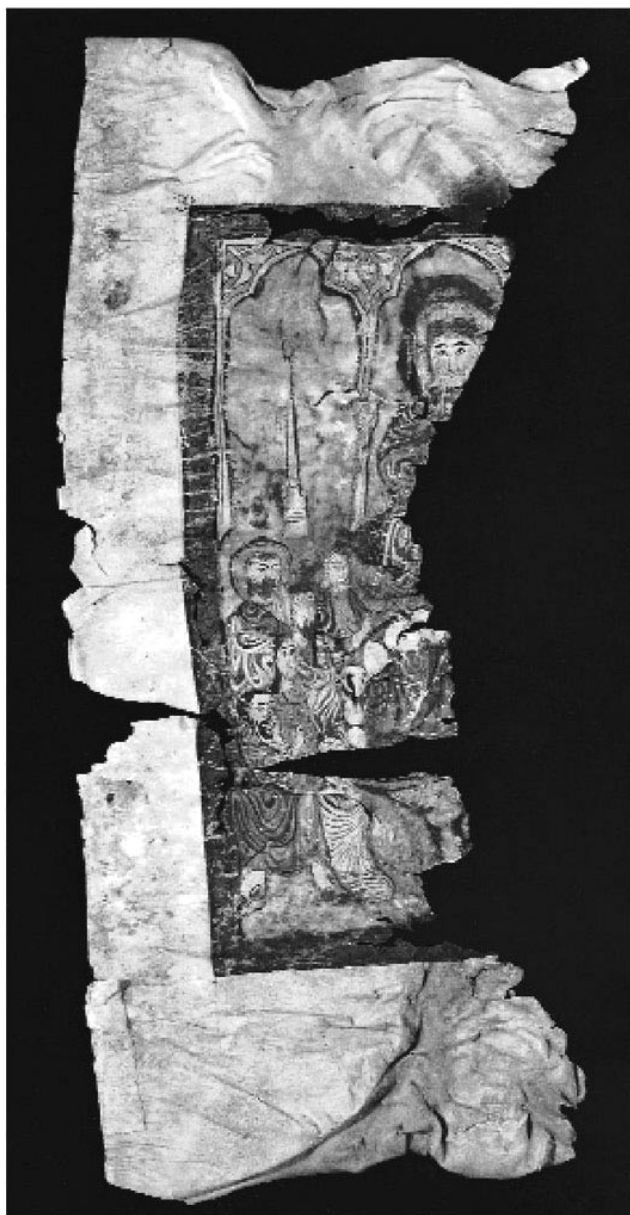


Fig. 4. *Leaf 2v. Last Supper* (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)



Fig. 5. *Vat. Syr. 559 f. 128r, Last Supper*

brows and in semi-profile, bears a strong resemblance to Christ in the Vatican manuscript. His extended right arm crossing his body appears to represent a clumsy interpretation, while the folds of his garments are an abstraction. The broad range of colours is characteristic of the Vatican and London lectionaries, including the use of a green background in a leaf from the London lectionary preserved in the Mingana collection in Birmingham.⁸

There are unusual elements in the scene, which can be explained through affiliations with imagery in other eastern Christian manuscripts and with secular Arab art. For example, the figures to the lower left (Fig. 4) have apparently been adopted from a Raising of Lazarus scene,

⁸ The Healing of the Leper, reproduced in L.-A. Hunt, *The Mingana and Related Collections: a Survey of Illustrated Arabic, Persian and Turkish Manuscripts in the Selly Oak Colleges*, Birmingham, 1997, pp. 59–60, no. 89 (MS Syr. 590), colour pl. 4.

such as those of the Syriac lectionaries in the Vatican and London, and other seventh/thirteenth-century lectionaries.⁹ There the lowest figure on the left, as well as the one behind him, holds his nose as he points to the small swaddled figure in front of him. This resurrection reference anticipates the Passion and reinforces the sacrificial nature of the scene. Other unexpected features can be explained with reference to secular art. Christ is depicted like a seated ruler presiding over a feast. Such a ruler appears in a frontispiece from a volume of a secular text, the *Kūtāb al-aghānī* (*The Book of Songs*), now in Istanbul, made for a ruler of Mosul in c. 1218–19 (Fig. 6).¹⁰ Here the common ethnicity of the faces suggests that such an Arabic book, as opposed to antecedents in Greek author portraits, could well have provided the immediate model, with the seated ruler presiding over a feast and surrounded by courtiers.

3. A fragmentary folio (measuring 42.3 × 17.5 cm at its widest).

r) The Crucifixion (Fig. 7) is here represented on this between the texts of Luke 23.44 and Matthew 27.46.¹¹ The scene is set within a border with a pink and dark red trailing pattern. Most of the figure of Christ survives, strapped and nailed to the cross and wearing a long blue loincloth. His eyes are open. The dividing of Christ's garment between the soldiers takes place below. Since only the right half of the scene survives, only one of the thieves now remains, flanked by the sponge bearer and John. Above the cross is a fragmentary inscription, with the moon to the right. Notable is the inclusion of contemporary detail in the costume of the sponge-bearer, who wears a tall blue hat and geometrically-patterned garment.

Several of these elements echo those in the scene in the Syriac Rabbula Gospels, made at the monastery of St John at Zaghba on the Euphrates in 586.¹² Both have the sun and moon, thieves, the Virgin

⁹ In these the Raising of Lazarus appears as a separate scene. See, for example, Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, pp. 290, 306, pl. 85 (3–4) (London and Vatican lectionaries); p. 325 with pl. 106 (2) (Hah lectionary, for which see below, n. 14).

¹⁰ Istanbul, Millet Kütüphanesi Feyzullah Efendi 1566 f. 1r., in R. Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, New York, 1977, pp. 64–5, reproduced on pp. 65 and 58 (detail). Ettinghausen points to other secular portraits, including illustrations in the Arabic translation from the Greek scientific treatises of Dioscorides. For further discussion of the religious/secular overlap see L.-A. Hunt, "Manuscript Production by Christians in 13th–14th Century Greater Syria and Mesopotamia and Related Areas", *ARAM* 9–10, 1997–98, pp. 289–336, esp. 290–6, repr. in L. A. Hunt, *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam: Art at the Crossroads of the Medieval Mediterranean* vol. II, London, 2000, no. XVI, pp. 153–97, esp. pp. 154–60.

¹¹ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 412, no. 3, pl. 149 (3).

¹² Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, pp. 150–2 with pl. 32.

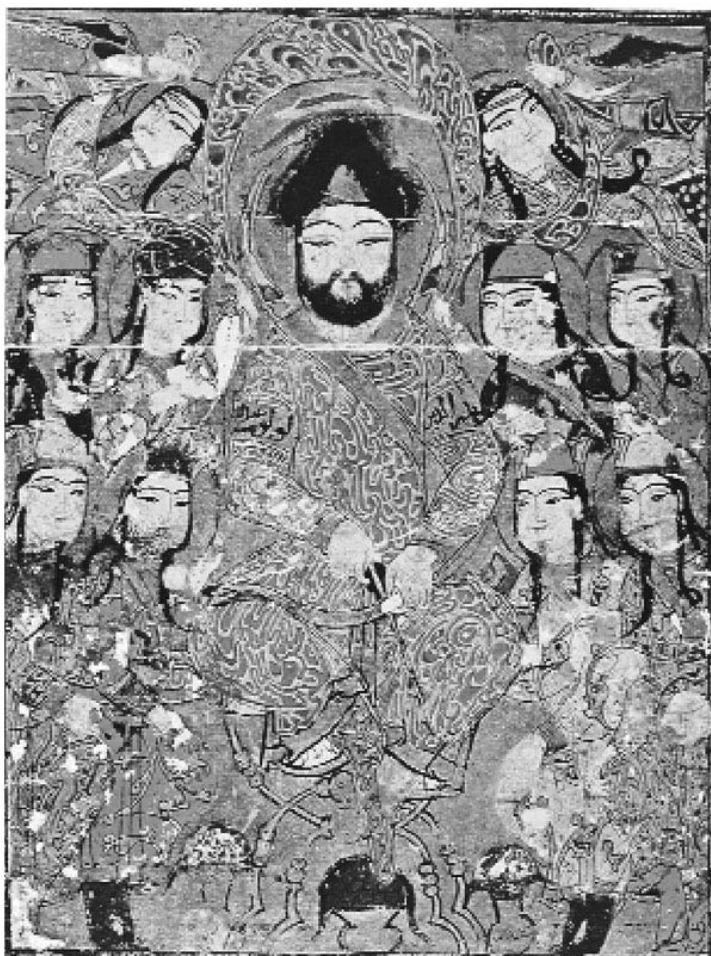


Fig. 6. *Frontispiece*, Kitāb al-aghānī (Book of Songs), vol. XVII, Istanbul, Millet Kütüphanesi Feyzullah Efendi 1566 f. 1r (after Ettinghausen)

and St John, with the dividing of the garments below. In line with the changed attitude to representing Christ's mortality in the intervening centuries, the loincloth has replaced the colobium in the seventh/thirteenth-century scene, together with the introduction of the contemporary dress of the sponge-bearer. For these updated motifs, a parallel is the Crucifixion in a Syriac lectionary formerly at Mār Ḥananiyya (Dayr

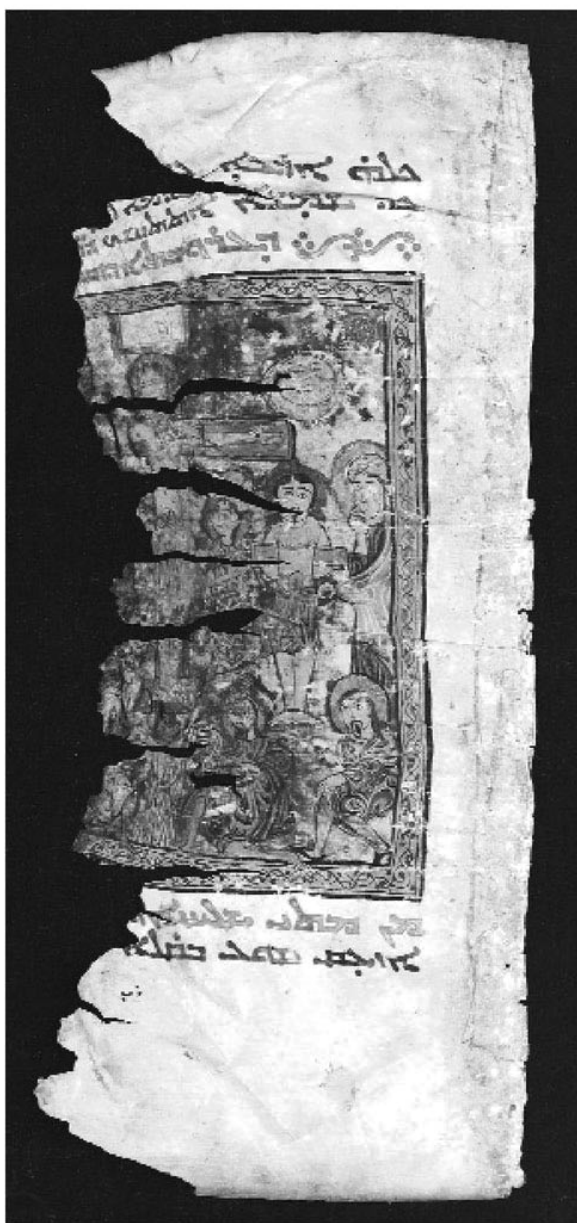


Fig. 7. Leaf 3r. Crucifixion (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)

al-Za‘farān) (Fig. 8), and now at the Church of the Forty Martyrs at Mardīn. It is dateable to c. 1250, the year in which the scribe, Dioscoros Theodoros, Bishop of Ḥiṣn Ziyād (present day Kharpūt in Turkish Armenia), added a prayer to the point in the manuscript just preceding the feast of Easter.¹³ However, the delicate tendril border of the London scene is closer to that framing the Raising of Lazarus and several other scenes in the lectionary made in 1226 for the church of Mār Saba at Ḥaḥ, the residence of the bishops of the Ṭūr ‘Abdīn from the fifth/eleventh century.¹⁴ This manuscript, now preserved in the Syrian Orthodox Episcopate in Mardīn, was made at the monastery of Ṣalāḥ which is not far from Mār Mattaī when modern political boundaries are disregarded.¹⁵ The Ḥaḥ lectionary, in common with the leaves under discussion, is made of parchment, unusual in the seventh/thirteenth century when most manuscripts were being made of paper.

v) On the *verso* of this leaf is, in the right column, Matthew 27.46–9 (fragmentary), the Reading for the 9th hour on Good Friday, with John 19.25–8 in the left column.

4. Now lost from the group is a fragmentary folio, published by Leroy, which depicts on one side the scene of the Burial of Christ (Fig. 9) below the reading for Holy Saturday (Matthew 27.62).¹⁶ This scene adapts elements from those reproduced in each of the Syriac lectionaries mentioned so far. Working from the published photograph, the scene shows two haloed mourning women, empty-handed and so not the myrrophores as might be expected, holding their hands to their faces in grief. To the left of them a haloed male figure in a short tunic supports the feet of Christ. He would have been one of two carrying the body of Christ into the tomb, as depicted in the Ḥaḥ lectionary and the lectionary of Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros.¹⁷ The artist has, however, made changes, selecting elements from several scenes to produce

¹³ P. 285 of the manuscript; Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, pp. 375–6 with pl. 132 (1). Dioscoros Theodoros’ scribal signature of 1250 is given on p. 380, with nn. 2–3 on his life, known from Bar Hebraeus. For this MS see now Lamia Doumato, “The Art of Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros: Interpreting Syriac Miniatures in the Crusader East”, *Arte Cristiana* 87, fasc. 793, 1999, pp. 245–60.

¹⁴ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, pp. 321–32, citing the colophon, pp. 329–30. For the tendril framing see particularly the Temptation of Christ, pl. 105 (4), Resurrection of Lazarus, pl. 106 (2), Descent from the Cross, pl. 106 (3), and the Good Samaritan, pl. 108 (3).

¹⁵ A point made by Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 330.

¹⁶ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 412 with pl. 149 (2), folio e. Leroy does not give the dimensions of the folio.

¹⁷ Respectively, Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 326 with pl. 106 (4); p. 376 with pl. 133 (2).



Fig. 8. *Crucifixion, Lectionary of Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros, Church of the Forty Martyrs, Mardin (Photo: Syrian Orthodox Church calendar for 1991)*



Fig. 9. *Leaf 4, Burial of Christ (Photo: after Leroy)*

an eclectic image. The man with bare legs is apparently the servant of Joseph of Arimathea as he appears in the Ḥaḥ lectionary scene. The female figure to the right is the mourning Virgin, as in Dioscoros Theodoros' lectionary, although here only accompanied by one other woman.¹⁸ The tree behind the figures, together with the more stylised

¹⁸ The Ḥaḥ lectionary depicts the mourning Virgin, a single representative of the myrophores, and a third woman behind; see n. 17.

draperies, are features of the scene in both the Vatican and London lectionaries, which merges the Appearance of the Angel to the Myrophores with that of Jesus to Mary Magdalen in the Garden.¹⁹

5. A fragmentary folio (41 × 32.5 cm, maximum measurements).

r) On its *recto* is the image of the Incredulity of Thomas (Fig. 10), with the number 223 in a later hand (designated by the Syriac letters *vkḡ*) at the base.²⁰ Under a vividly-coloured trefoil arch stands Christ, naked to the waist, grasping the hand of Thomas which he holds to the wound in his side. To his left, five apostles look on. The frame is red, blue and beige, with the base comprising an arabesque design with trees in between.

The Incredulity of Thomas scenes from both a fragmentary Syriac lectionary from the very end of the sixth/twelfth century in Paris (B.N. Syr 355), illustrated in Melitene, and the Ḥaḥ Lectionary (Fig. 11, colour) provide parallels.²¹ Both replicate the mosaic of the scene in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, undertaken in 1169 for the Byzantine emperor Manuel Comnenos and King Amalric of Jerusalem, arguably with the involvement of a Syrian artist-ecclesiastic, as a political and ecumenical statement.²² For example, on the fragmentary folio Christ and the apostles stand beneath a large trefoil arch, its spandrels decorated with a lotus design, an elaboration of the arch over the scene in the Paris lectionary. The only major divergence from these two lectionaries, the exclusion of the closed door, can again be matched in the same scene in the Vatican and London lectionaries.²³ Ornamental motifs too are comparable: the Presentation in the Temple in the Vatican lectionary has decorative trefoil arches over the figures of the Virgin and Simeon with the Child, while lotus ornament similar to

¹⁹ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 294 with pl. 91 (4) (Vat. Syr. 559 f. 143r); p. 308 with pl. 91 (3) (London, B.L. Add. 7170 f. 160r).

²⁰ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 412, folio f, unillustrated.

²¹ MS Paris, B.N. Syr. 355: Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, pp. 271, 277 with pl. 69 (1). An inscription naming the deacon Joseph of Melitene as the painter is given on pp. 272–3. The Ḥaḥ lectionary in Mardin: Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 327 with pl. 109 (3). Lamia Doumato, “Opening the Door to Paradise: Bishop Theodorus and Saint Thomas Imagery in Thirteenth-Century Syria”, *Al-Masāq* 12, 2000, pp. 141–71, discusses the significance of the closed door in this representation, and p. 144 with n. 14 gives further information about Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros, who was Maphrian from 1264, and his books.

²² L.-A. Hunt, “Art and Colonialism: The Mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (1169) and the Problem of ‘Crusader Art’”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45, 1991, pp. 69–85, esp. p. 81 with Fig. 11, repr. in Hunt, *Byzantium, Eastern Christendom and Islam*, pp. 224–60, esp. p. 245 with fig. 11.

²³ In the scenes in these two manuscripts the emphasis is now on a large cupola instead; Leroy, *Manuscripts syriacques*, p. 295 with pl. 94 (4) (Vat. 599); p. 308 with pl. 94 (3) (Add. 7170).



Fig. 10. *Leaf 5r. Incredulity of Thomas* (Photo: courtesy Sam Fogg)

that of the London fragment bands the top of the portrait of the evangelists Matthew and Mark in the same manuscript.²⁴

v) Portraits of the four evangelists are depicted as a group on the *verso* (Fig. 12).²⁵ Reading from right to left, upper to lower, are Matthew, Luke, John (largely lost), and Mark. All four are shown seated and writing against a green background. Notable are their delicately painted

²⁴ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriaques*, pp. 286–7 with pl. 81 (4) (Presentation); p. 281 with pl. 70 (1), portrait of Matthew and Mark.

²⁵ Leroy, *Manuscripts syriaques*, pp. 411–12 with pl. 149 (1), as folio b, describes it as a separate folio at the beginning of the original manuscript, when it is in fact the *verso* of the *Incredulity of Thomas*.



Fig. 11. *Incredulity of Thomas*, *Hah Lectionary*, Syrian Orthodox Episcopate, Mardin
(Photo: Syrian Orthodox Church calendar for 1991)

faces and colourful garments, shaped in careful folds. Surrounding the picture is a blue and white border, outlined in red. The grouping of the Evangelists appears elsewhere in Syriac illumination. Although the ordering is different, the best example is that in a fragmentary Lectionary in Paris (B.N. Syr. 356) of the end of the sixth/twelfth

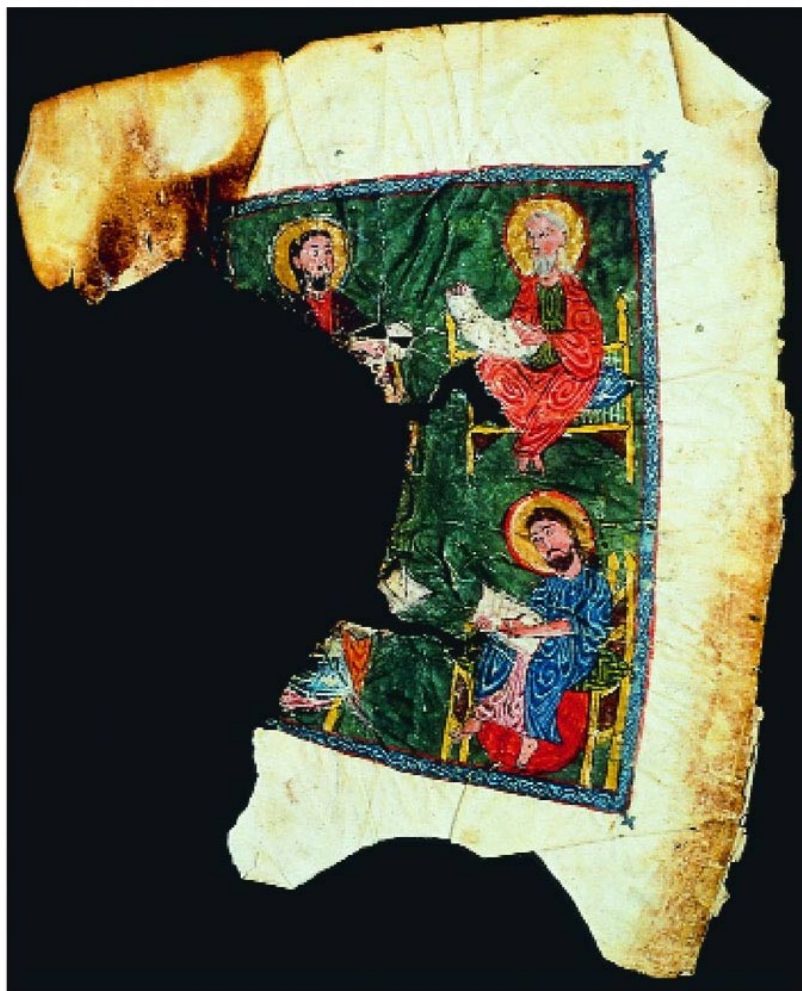


Fig. 12. *Leaf 5v. Four Evangelists* (Photo: Sam Fogg)

century.²⁶ The Vatican and London lectionaries show the Evangelists in pairs.²⁷ These are most likely to have their origins in Byzantine evangelist portraits. The paired portraits in another seventh/thirteenth-century lectionary in Mardīn, written by Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros and given by him to the church of the Mother of God near Ḥiṣn Ziyād in 1272, has Greek inscriptions accompanying the Syriac ones.²⁸

Conclusion

These folios are from a seventh/thirteenth-century Syriac Lectionary in the Harklean version, unusually of parchment and not paper. The script is one used during the sixth/twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth centuries, while the illustrations would suggest the latter end of that time span, shortly before the mid-seventh/thirteenth century. The most telling parallels are with the Vatican and London Lectionaries of c. 1220 and the Ḥaḥ Lectionary of 1226, as well as the two Lectionaries of Bishop Dioscoros Theodoros of the mid-seventh/thirteenth century. The leaves demonstrate the affiliations that existed through Syrian Orthodox church networks between the various centres of manuscript production in the seventh/thirteenth century, Mosul, Kharput and Melitene in particular. Manuscripts would have been exchanged, borrowed and copied and, as several of the other manuscripts mentioned here show, made for monasteries in the area or given to them at a later date. Particular scribes and major church figures, of which Dioscoros Theodoros was both, were at the forefront of both activities, and stimulated these processes.

Their interest, then, lies in their being all that remains of a once finely written and illustrated Syrian Orthodox Lectionary, with readings arranged for the ecclesiastical year. Attributable to a monastery in the Tūr ʿAbdīn area, possibly Mār Ḥananiyya (Dayr al-Zaʿfarān) or a related monastery, their affiliations lie in Syriac and other Eastern Christian manuscript illumination of the period of the Crusades, as well as secular Arab art. They exhibit a vibrancy of imagery and colour fully characteristic of the cultural revival of Syrian Orthodox culture of the time, and show not only the survival but also the development of a thriving indigenous culture during the period of the Crusades.

²⁶ Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques*, pp. 409–10 with pl. 57 (2).

²⁷ Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques*, p. 281 with pl. 70 (1) (Vat. Syr. 559 Matthew and Mark); p. 303 with pl. 70 (2) (London Add. 7170 Matthew and Mark); and p. 303 with pl. 71 (1) (Luke and John).

²⁸ Leroy, *Manuscrits syriaques*, p. 386 with pls 137 (1–2).

PAUL OF ANTIOCH'S *LETTER TO A MUSLIM*
FRIEND AND THE LETTER FROM CYPRUS

David Thomas

The correspondence that was generated by Paul of Antioch, the Melkite Bishop of Sidon, when he wrote his apparently innocent *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, is one of the longest and maybe most vehement in the whole history of Christian-Muslim relations. The *Letter* itself provoked a stern rebuttal, and when it was later circulated in an expanded form it attracted some of the most lengthy and heated responses ever written by Muslims. So it certainly deserves close examination. Here we shall discuss some of its most inflammatory arguments and religious claims, and will also compare its original and expanded versions in order to gauge the character of the changes that were made by a later hand.¹

The Date of Paul's Letter

If we discount the obviously artificial circumstances given in the *Letter* itself, we know nothing about its immediate purpose. And we know very little about Paul himself. Indications from his works and some other sources give us the few details that he originated from Antioch, entered the monastic life, and was later consecrated Melkite Bishop of Sidon. As to his *Letter*, its editor Paul Khoury suggests that he must have written this before 1221 AD when, he says, MS Sinai Arabic 448, which he regards as the earliest known copy of the Letter, was made. Khoury adds that Paul may well have composed it in the second part of the sixth/twelfth century, since its tone and character fit in with the historical conditions of this period.² He settles on a date between about 1140 and 1200.

S. K. Samir, however, contests these details. He points out that the note in MS Sinai Arabic 448 which forms the basis of Khoury's computation of the year 1221 AD is not part of the original text but in

¹ The original Letter is edited and translated in French in P. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche, évêque melkite de Sidon (xii^e s.)*, Beirut, 1964, pp. 58–83 (Arabic) and 169–87 (French). T. Michel, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, Delmar, New York, 1984, pp. 87–96, discusses these two points but very briefly and without going into detail.

² Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, pp. 8–18, accepted by Michel, *Response*, pp. 403f., n. 3.

fact a later reader's note, and should really be interpreted as 1530 AD. In the light of this, he rules out Sinai Arabic 448 as an early witness and points to MS Sinai Arabic 531, which can be reliably dated to 1232 AD, as both the first known copy of the *Letter* and the first concrete evidence of the latest date when Paul could have written it.³

Samir cautiously adds that the earliest possible time of writing can be no later than the period of Elias of Nisibis who died in 1046, because allusions to his ideas are the only clear internal evidence of dependence in Paul's works themselves.⁴ He refuses to speculate further about a more precise date, unlike Khoury, as we have seen, and also C. Cahen, who places the *Letter* in the eleventh century, though on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone.⁵

It is certainly difficult to be certain about Paul. However, as Khoury plausibly argues,⁶ it is likely that the *Letter* with all its provocative claims would not have lain unnoticed by Muslims for very long after it was written. And so we are probably not too far wrong if we assume a date of writing around the year 1200. Certainly, sometime in the course of the seventh/thirteenth century it came to the attention of the Egyptian jurist Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfi (626/1228–684/1285), and provoked him to compose his reply, *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*.⁷ And then at the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century it was sent in its extended form from Cyprus to the theologians Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya and Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Anṣārī at Damascus. They each wrote a long and crushing reply.⁸

³ S. K. Samir, "Notes sur la 'Lettre à un musulman de Sidon' de Paul d'Antioche", *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 24, 1993 [pp. 179–95], pp. 180–90.

⁴ Samir, "Notes", p. 180; and cf. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 13 and n. 24.

⁵ C. Cahen, *Orient et Occident au temps des Croisades*, Paris, 1983, p. 272 n. 7: 'J'incline personnellement à [le] placer . . . au XI^e siècle: Paul dit avoir été à Amalfi, ce qui est possible au XII^e siècle, mais plus vraisemblable au XI^e: il paraît ignorer aussi bien les Latins que les Arméniens d'Orient; il écrit en arabe, ce qui pour un melkite est possible depuis le X^e siècle; seul terminus *post quem* sûr, il connaît Elie de Nizibe.'

⁶ Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, pp. 14f.

⁷ Al-Qarāfi, *Al-ajwiba al-fākhira 'an al-as'ila al-fājira*, ed. B. Z. Awad, Cairo, 1987.

⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb al-sāhīh li-man baddala dīn al-Masīhī*, Cairo, 1905, translated in part by T. Michel in *Response*. See Michel, *Response*, pp. 370–82, for arguments that the *Jawāb* extends only to vol. III, p. 275 of this printed text. Ibn Abī Ṭālib's response has not previously been edited, a task presently being undertaken in collaboration with Professor R. Ebied of the University of Sydney by the author of this chapter, which forms part of the preliminary study.

Paul's Purpose in Writing

Paul's *Letter* itself is relatively brief, no more than 64 short paragraphs in Khoury's edition. Its tone is not on the surface polemical but fair and reasonable, though as its argument unfolds this approach proves more provocative than any direct attack. Its occasion, according to Paul, was the request made by a Muslim friend in Sidon for an account of the journey he had made to Europe and the people he met. This setting provides him with characters who can explain from their remote position why Islam is not only no threat to them but a partial confirmation of their beliefs.

An idea of the apparently eirenic but in reality disconcerting tone of the *Letter* is given at the very outset, when Paul greets his Muslim friend with the words, 'May God give to me and to you the advantage of perceptiveness, *ʿtibār*, and may he make this urge you and me to reflect upon actions that lead to paradise and deliver from hell' (para. 2). This is all courteous friendliness on the surface, but beneath its even-handed expression it hints that salvation depends upon the proper use of one's understanding. The rest of the *Letter* is an explanation of how the friend might apply his perceptiveness more acutely in interpreting the Qur'an properly, and so come to see the truth of Christian teachings.

His friend goes on to ask Paul about the views concerning Muḥammad⁹ held by the people he met on his journey. Paul tells him that he travelled to Byzantine territory and Constantinople, and further afield to Amalfi, parts of Europe and Rome. There he was able to converse with leading experts, who told him that they had secured a copy of the Qur'an, the book which 'Muḥammad said had descended upon him from God'. They had not thought it persuasive (paras 3-5), for reasons they go on to give at length in the body of deceptively reasonable arguments that follow. We must not seriously imagine that the European experts whom Paul says he encountered were real people. Of course, there is no inherent reason to deny that as a bishop of the church Paul did travel as far as Italy. But the existence of European Christian scholars who knew the text of the Qur'an in its original Arabic so well that they could not only quote it but also introduce subtle changes seems far-fetched.¹⁰ It is much more plausible to accept that the sophisticated interpretations of the Qur'an they are given to

⁹ On Paul's use of *ʿalayhi al-salām* after the mention of the Prophet's name, cf. S. K. Samir's chapter in this volume, pp. 75-106, on the customary respect shown to him by Christian Arab authors, despite their refusal to acknowledge claims about him.

¹⁰ Cf. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, pp. 13f. and especially n. 25.

present, and the formulations of Christian doctrine they deduce from these, arose within the mind of someone who was actively involved in debate with Muslims, and thought and wrote in Arabic. But these experts who must be assumed to be literary *personae* provide Paul with the perfect mask of scholars who possess informed though detached interest, from behind which he can direct his attacks and appear to be transmitting the views of objective, rational intellects. In both their tone and arguments they will leave the impression that Muslims who do not accept these Christianised interpretations of their own scripture are in a prejudiced minority.¹¹

The typical approach followed by these invented experts is set out in the first argument they advance in their supposed exchange with Paul:

I said: Since you have heard of this messenger, and have made the effort to obtain the book he brought, for what reason did you not follow him, especially when it says in the book, 'Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it will not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers'? They replied: For various reasons. I said: What are they?

They said: One is that the book is in Arabic and not in our language, as is said in it, namely: 'We have sent down the Qur'an in Arabic'. Also because we find in it, 'We have not sent a messenger except in the language of his people'; also, 'It is he who sent among the unlettered people a messenger of their own, who would recount his signs to them, purify them, and teach them the book and the wisdom; before this they were indeed in obvious error'; also, 'So that you may admonish a people to whom no warner has come before you, so that they may be rightly guided'; also, 'We have revealed to you an Arabic Qur'an, so that you may warn the mother of cities and all around her, and warn of the Day of Assembly, of which there is no doubt'; also, 'In order that you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, and who therefore remain heedless'; also, 'And admonish your nearest kinsmen'.

When we saw this in it we knew he had not been sent to us, *lam yur-sal ilaynā*, but to the pagan Arabs, about whom he said that a warner had never come to them before him; and that we did not have to follow him because messengers came to us before him, addressing us in our tongues, warning us and giving us the Torah and Gospel in our languages; and that it is made plain by the book that he was only sent to pagan Arabs. So his words, 'Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam

¹¹ Some centuries earlier Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz had communicated the same sense of superiority from Christians, who argued that since neither they nor any other of the many religions of their time knew of the Qur'anic miracle of the baby Jesus speaking in the cradle, the majority view prevails and Muslims must be wrong; al-Jāhīz, *Al-radd 'alā al-Naṣārā in Thālāth rasā'il li-Abī 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz*, ed. J. Finkel, Cairo, 1926, pp. 12.4–13.4.

it will not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers', by these he means, as reason judges, his people to whom he came in their language, not others to whom he did not come, as is contained in it. (paras 5-7)

What is immediately significant here is the way in which the Qur'an is used. Somewhat surprisingly, Paul draws the attention of these European Christians to the admonition that Islam is the only religion that is acceptable to God implicitly assuming that they will acknowledge his argument as valid. We might expect them to dismiss this overture with some withering remark in line with the typical Christian attitude shown in this and earlier periods. But as surprisingly as Paul, they engage with his argument in its own terms, adroitly adducing appropriate verses from the text to prove that the Qur'an and Muḥammad were only sent to the pagan Arabs and not to them. Their argument indicates at the very outset that Paul through these fictional experts intends in his *Letter* to present his own independent reading of the text. Furthermore since these figures are notionally outside the context of Islam they can be given interpretations that have no connection with anything acknowledged as the accepted meaning within Muslim circles, but can claim to be simply following what the text itself, separated from any exegetical accretions, contains. They are in effect offering a rival reading of the Qur'anic text to that followed in Muslim tradition, and their stance places any respondents on the defensive in having to give reasons why the apparently straightforward interpretation which they so innocently offer is wrong.

A second point worth noting in this initial argument is that unusually among Christian Arab authors,¹² Paul is required by the logic of this approach to make the substantial concession that Muḥammad was actually sent from God. He may have come as messenger only to his own people, but he was nevertheless authentic. Paul says in his own words: *lam yursal illā ilā al-jāhiliyya min al-ʿArab* (para. 7), in his choice of the verb *arsala* appearing consciously, if indirectly, to be according a measure of validity to Muḥammad's status. In the same way, his use of the Qur'an here and throughout the *Letter* implicitly suggests that he accepts its authority in some form. But, of course, the return for these concessions is that he can prove the truth of Christian beliefs from this apparently hostile text, and in the process force any Muslim opponent to deny the plausibility of the partial interpretations he makes. No wonder leading Muslim scholars sought to respond to him. His cunning Christianisation of their scripture presented an obvious threat

¹² Cf. S. K. Samir's chapter in this volume, esp. pp. 104f.

to their own reading of the Qur'an and the teaching about Christianity they found in it.

In order to win his case, Paul of course has to ignore those verses that speak explicitly against the Christian doctrines he wishes to identify in the Qur'anic text. But he is ready to defend his method with an ingenious, if eventually unpersuasive, explanation. Later in the *Letter* he raises this issue before the European experts: 'I said: If we present arguments based upon what is their book, the Muslims will say: If you present arguments from part of it, you have to accept all of it.' This logic seems irresistible, and means that these Christians would have to take into account more awkward verses than the ones they have chosen, and so tone down the support they claim to find, or even acknowledge altogether that it is not there. But they reply:

The issue is not shaped like this. One man may have a note, *kitāb*, for a hundred *dinārs* against another, but the note shows that the latter has discharged it. If the creditor shows the note and asks the debtor for the hundred *dinārs*, and if then the debtor argues from the note that he has discharged it, can the creditor then say to him: Just as you acknowledge this, acknowledge the hundred *dinārs* and pay it? Surely not. He can refuse anything to do with the hundred *dinārs* in the note because the note also says that he has discharged it.

In the same way, whatever is imputed to us or argued against us from this book, *kitāb*, we will also reject from the arguments in our favour which we find in the book. And so we say that our strongest arguments are those we find in the book brought by this messenger. (paras 45–7)

This is a rather contorted justification, and for all its ingenuity it eventually fails to convince. The simile of the sentence of discharge cancelling the debt in the note on which it is written may be an indirect way of suggesting the idea that the verses which seem to support Christianity abrogate other less favourable parts of the Qur'an, or at least are not abrogated by them. But Paul fails to clinch his point because he does not show why these verses should be preferred to others that deny Christian doctrines. To pursue the simile, why should these be the cancelling sentence rather than the original cancelled debt? The *Letter* does not explain.

Paul's Proof of Christianity from the Qur'an

In the main body of the *Letter* Paul demonstrates in detail the principle he sets out in these opening paragraphs. He shows variously how the Qur'an accords high status to Jesus and Mary (paras 8–10), endorses the role of the disciples of Jesus and confirms the reliability of the

Gospel (paras 11–16), and expresses approval of Christians and their forms of worship (paras 17–23). Even more significantly, he argues, it refers to God in Trinitarian terms (paras 24–32), mentions Christ in words that imply both his humanity and divinity (paras 33–40), and refers to the characteristics of God in ways that are consistent with what Christian doctrine says about the Trinity (paras 41–63). Some examples from these arguments will illustrate how Paul provocatively brings out Christian significances and his precise method in doing this.

On the subject of Jesus' disciples, Paul says that their authenticity is endorsed by such verses as: 'We have sent our messengers, *rusulanā*, with the proofs, and with them the book, so that men may practise fairness.' He observes that the *rusul* referred to here must be the Apostles of Jesus, because if the line of prophets accepted in Islamic tradition had been intended the verse would have stated not 'the book' but 'the books' which in Muslim beliefs those prophets delivered (para. 13). What he does not say, however, is that he has lightly but decisively edited this verse, which in the Qur'an itself reads: 'We have sent our messengers with the proofs, and have revealed with them the book and the balance, so that men may practise fairness' (Q 57.25). The important phrase *wa-anzalnā ma'ahum*, 'we have revealed with them', indicates that God revealed the same scriptural message upon each 'messenger', and makes it much easier to identify them as the line of prophets which Paul denies than the Apostles who were sent out by Jesus.

With the support of such verses as Q 3.3 (quoted with small but telling omissions) and 10.94, which link the Qur'an with earlier revelations in reciprocal confirmation, Paul goes on to claim that the Qur'an denies there could have been any alteration to the text of the Bible (para. 14). And then he makes one of the most audacious interpretations in the whole *Letter*. He quotes Q 2.1f.: 'A L M. That is the book, *dhālika al-kitāb*, in which there is no doubt, guidance for the pious', and then unselfconsciously proceeds to explain it in favour of the Gospel:

A L M are a part, which is AL-Masīḥ. And 'that is the book' is the Gospel, because it says, 'If they call you a liar, you were already called liars; they brought the proofs, the Psalms and the luminous book.' This is the Gospel which the messengers before you brought together with proofs, and because it is 'that book'; for 'that' is not 'this'. (para. 16)

His explanation of the three mysterious letters as part of the title of Jesus is startling, but his calm exegesis of 'that book' as the Gospel, on the grounds that the 'luminous book' brought by 'messengers' before Muḥammad is conveniently identified as the Christian scripture, and that the remote demonstrative adjective 'that' must refer to a scripture outside the Qur'an itself (which would have to be referred to as 'this'),

shows casual indifference to Muslim sensitivities. What is so clear in this ingenious Christianisation of the verse is that it takes no account either of the immediate context in the Qur'an, or of the consensus of Muslim exegetical tradition, though it is worth pointing out that earlier interpretations of *dhālika al-kitāb* which agree with this are known.¹³

We see in these examples how the simile of the cancelled bill of debt is worked out. Individual verses of the Qur'an are removed from their original context and given an interpretation which fits them into a Christian context, where they function as auxiliary supports for received doctrines. By implication the Qur'an, which Paul has already referred to as a localised revelation intended only for the *ummiyyūn*, 'unlettered', who have not received any previous warning and are ignorant, *al-jāhiliyya min al-'Arab* (paras 6–7), becomes a supplementary though imperfect guide to Christianity. It follows that Christians have no business to divert from their own scriptures, because the Qur'an has little to give them.

Another subtle example of Paul's Christianising technique occurs in his summary of the Qur'an's teachings about Jesus. Here he says that, among other miracles, Jesus 'made, *'amala*, from clay the shape of a bird and he breathed into it and it flew by the permission of God' (para. 9). This is, of course, a paraphrase of the two verses in the Qur'an that recount this miracle, Q 3.49 where Jesus says, 'I have come to you with a sign from your Lord; I create, *akhluqu*, for you from clay the shape of a bird and I breathe into it, and it is a bird by the permission of God', and Q 5.110 where God tells Jesus, 'You create, *takhluqu*, from clay the shape of a bird by my permission and you breathe into it, and it is a bird by my permission.' But close comparison between the three versions shows a small though important change in emphasis. For, whereas the two verses of the Qur'an make it unavoidably clear that the human Jesus only performs the miracle with external divine help, Paul's omission of all references that preserve the distinction between Jesus and God brings out the emphasis that the human and divine work in concert to accomplish the miracle. He may even be intending to imply that it is the human and divine natures within Christ himself that work together. For his somewhat surprising change of verb from *khalāqa*, to create, in the Qur'an versions to the more ordinary *'amala*, to make, could be his way of suggesting that it was the human nature that shaped the clay forms,

¹³ Cf. H. Berg, "Tabarī's Exegesis of the Qur'anic Term *al-Kitāb*", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, 1995, pp. 761–74, and also B. Roggema's chapter above, p. 62.

while it was the divine nature that made them living beings and caused them to fly.¹⁴

Subtleties of this kind occur throughout the *Letter*, each of them contributing to create the impression that, if read judiciously and with Christian intentions, the Qur'an can be seen to support Christian doctrines.

A final example illustrates another typical aspect of Paul's polemical strategy, which is to suggest that the Muslims show themselves as rather provincial in their argumentative techniques and inexperienced in knowledge if they disagree with well-supported Christian views. This occurs in the last part of the *Letter* where he defends the doctrine of the Trinity, and it is worth following his arguments in detail. He begins by explaining that when he informed his European experts that Muslims accuse them of giving the impression of three gods or a composite deity when they call God three hypostases, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, they replied that the Muslims themselves could be accused of giving the impression of anthropomorphism when they refer to God as having eyes, hands, a leg and a face. The Muslims would respond to such an accusation, says Paul, by saying they talk of God in this way because the Qur'an does, though these expressions are not to be taken literally, *al-murād bi-dhālika ghayru ṣāhir al-lafẓ* (para. 51). To this the Christians crushingly reply that in exactly the same way the Gospel gives them sanction to talk in this way about God, and that they likewise do not employ their terminology according to the normal usage (paras 49–54).

This is a neat and convincing answer, though it is incomplete as it stands. For whereas Muslims would not defend the literal meaning of the anthropomorphic references in the Qur'an, Christians would be obliged to maintain that the three divine Persons exist in reality. So there is some risk that if the comparison were pressed home the European experts might have to concede a nominalist doctrine of the Trinity. They have, nevertheless, shown that Muslims face similar problems to them if they follow the same procedure of deriving their doctrine directly from scripture.

Paul now continues his defence of the Christian position by employing Aristotelian principles that were the stock of theological discourse in his day. When they were told that Muslims object to their calling God substance, *jawhar*, the Christian experts exclaimed: 'We have heard that these are people of refinement, culture and learning. But people

¹⁴ Cf. his interpretation of Q 4.157, the denial of the crucifixion, which he says is a reference to Christ's human nature being crucified and not his divine nature (para. 38, and see also para. 37).

who can be described in such a way, and who have read anything of the philosophers and books of logic, would not disapprove of this' (para. 55). They imply with mock surprise that the Muslim objection is unfounded, and that the Muslims themselves are lacking in the knowledge that any properly educated person might have acquired. Their attitude of condescension seems almost calculated to incense anyone who disagrees with them. But they do not relent, and now explain on the basis of Aristotelian principles and with painstaking simplicity how all existent things are either substances (singly or composite) or accidents, and since substances are the more noble, *ashraf*, of these two categories, God must be a substance, though uncreated. Furthermore, he is not a solid substance that might bear accidents, but is more like subtle substances such as the soul, intellect or light (paras 56–8).

This philosophical explanation is familiar in Christian-Muslim debates on the Trinity. And here we see the reverse of the situation maybe three centuries earlier in which the Ash'arite *mutakallim* Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) introduces the refutation of Christian doctrines that he includes in his *Kitāb al-tamhīd* with the argument that if God were a substance he would be like all other substances and hence part of the contingent order, capable of combining with other substances, able to bear accidents, and so on.¹⁵ The Muslim theologian rejects the premise that all existent things are either substances or accidents, on the basis that there is no equivalence between observed and unobserved reality. This is exactly the opposite assumption of what is taken for granted by Paul's experts, and it shows the great gap between the two sides which in their condescending exclamation they seek to conceal.

The Christians conclude their discourse on the Trinity with an explanation of the Incarnation. They argue that since God is just and generous, he must inform his creatures of his just law. But while he might send a prophet such as Moses to deliver his law of justice, *sharī'at al-ʿadl*, he could only impart his perfect law of grace, *sharī'at al-faḍl*, himself. And because he is generous he must give the most splendid of things, *bi-ajalli al-mawjūdāt*, which is his own Word. In this way he shows himself to be the most generous of givers. Then he must choose a perceptible essence in order to make manifest his power and generosity, and so he chose the noblest of creatures, a human being (paras 59–62).

This is very compressed, but nevertheless clear enough to aggravate Muslims. It begins from premises they would have to accept, that God is just and generous, *ʿadl wa-jawād*, and develops the twin implications

¹⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. R. J. McCarthy, Beirut, 1957, pp. 75–78.3.

that he could not disclose his supreme law through an intermediary but only through himself, and could only give the highest gift which is his own Word, his very utterance itself. Without stating it directly, this explanation is placing the revelation of Islam, which might be compared with the Mosaic law and was imparted through the intermediary Muḥammad, below the Christian revelation, and so making it inferior and superfluous. As the experts conclude:

After this perfection there was nothing remaining to impart, because everything that preceded it showed the necessity for it, and everything that followed it was not needed. Because anything that follows the perfect, although it may be excellent, must either be inferior or have borrowed from it; and what has borrowed is excellence that is not needed. (para. 63)

The faint gesture of praise made towards to Islam here, with its stinging reminder of the traditional Christian opinion that its teachings have been taken from Christianity,¹⁶ is damning in its condescension.

In this last argument Paul moves away from the text of the Qur'an to the logical axioms that informed much theological discourse in this period. In terms of these his step by step proof of the Trinity and Incarnation is impressive. But what must have been offensive is his assumption that any other system of logic must be erroneous, and anyone who disagrees with his findings cannot be intellectually sound.

So, in addition to the way it makes the Qur'an serve Christian purposes, Paul's *Letter* can only have outraged Muslims by the implicitly arrogant manner in which it shuts out any alternatives to the views it states, and presents its own views as necessarily right. It is little wonder that at least three Muslims were provoked to respond, since the *Letter* was an open insult and also a challenge to received Muslim teachings that could not be allowed to stand.

The Risāla al-Qubrusīyya

As we said above, the first known reply to Paul's *Letter* was made before 684/1285 by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī. Although he does not name Paul or quote the *Letter verbatim*, this Muslim jurist reports its arguments and follows its structure so fully and faithfully that there can be no doubt he knew the text itself.¹⁷ And it must have been read by many others as well. For at the beginning of the eighth/fourteenth century Ibn Taymiyya tells us: 'Their scholars have

¹⁶ Cf. the chapter by B. Roggema, above pp. 57–73.

¹⁷ Cf. Michel, *Response*, pp. 93f.

handed it down among themselves, and old copies still exist. It is attributed, *muḍāfa*, to Paul of Antioch the monk, bishop of Sidon, and he wrote it to one of his friends,¹⁸ which shows that he, at least, was aware of multiple copies of the *Letter*.

But here complications set in. For the version of the *Letter* to which Ibn Taymiyya and his contemporary Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī responded is not the same as Paul's original. It is our purpose in the rest of this article to make a preliminary comparison of the two, and see how the version known to these later respondents differs from Paul's *Letter to a Muslim Friend*.

The later, somewhat expanded version of the *Letter* exists in a number of examples. One, and maybe the earliest, is in Ibn Taymiyya's *Al-jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* where it is quoted almost *verbatim*.¹⁹ Another is in Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimashqī's *Risāla li-ahl jazīrat Qubrus*,²⁰ which may or may not be identical. Ibn Taymiyya received his copy in 716/1316 and Ibn Abī Ṭālib in 721/1321,²¹ both from Cyprus. Ibn Taymiyya indicates this in his explanation for writing the *Jawāb*: 'A letter has appeared from Cyprus, containing an argument for the religion of the Christians';²² and Ibn Abī Ṭālib says at greater length:

A letter came . . . , agreeable in politeness but surprising in intention and strange in purpose . . . The bishops, patriarchs, priests and monks, the foremost in the Christian religion and leaders of the community of Jesus, from the Island of Cyprus had sent it in two copies, one to . . . Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya . . . and the second to one whom they assumed had some knowledge.²³

And there are in addition four manuscript examples of the *Risāla* itself, in Paris arabe 214 dating from 1538, Paris arabe 215 dating from 1590, Beirut 946 dating from 1856, and the earliest, identified in recent years by S. K. Samir, in Paris arabe 204, ff. 49v–66v, dating from 1336.²⁴ Only a full comparison will clarify the relationship between these, whether they are substantially identical or significantly different. But

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, vol. I, p. 19.17–19; cf. Michel, *Response*, p. 93, quoting the previous few lines, and p. 141.

¹⁹ Michel, *Response*, p. 405, nn. 24–9, gives many of these passages from the 1984 edition, though these generally correspond to the 1905 edition.

²⁰ This is to be found in Utrecht MS 1449, of which my colleague Professor R. Ebied has identified a copy in the Bodleian Library.

²¹ Cf. Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 9 and nn. 6 and 7, more accurately dated by Samir, "Notes", p. 191.

²² Ibn Taymiyya, *Jawāb*, vol. I, p. 19.8f.

²³ Utrecht MS 1449, ff. 2r–v.

²⁴ These references and dates are given in Samir, "Notes", pp. 191f.

for our purposes it is enough to take one of them as representing the major additions made to Paul's *Letter* in order to see what intentions the author may have had.

We have chosen the earliest MS example of the *Risāla*, in Paris arabe 204. It is written in rather spidery, ill-formed characters, which in places require the assistance of the much more elegantly copied Paris arabe 214 to clarify. But Paris arabe 204 has the great advantage over the other MS examples of having been copied very near to the time the *Risāla* was received by the two Muslim masters in Damascus. According to its colophon it was copied in the year 1647 of the era of Alexander, 1336 of the Christian calendar, and 737 of the Muslim calendar (f. 66v), which brings it within about twenty years of Ibn Taymiyya's receipt of his copy of the letter. It was also copied in Cyprus itself, in Famagusta:

The weakest of God's worshippers and the one in most need of his mercy, the priest Ṣalībā b. Yuḥanna al-Mawṣilī prepared and verified this letter, *ḥaḍḍara ḥādhihi al-risāla wa-ṣaḥḥahāhā*, in the protected town of al-Maghūsa, in the province of the island of Cyprus (f. 66v).²⁵

This is convincing evidence that the original from which it was made precedes the forms that appear in Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abī Ṭālib's responses, though of course only a full examination of all three can decide this matter conclusively.

A cursory comparison of the letter from Cyprus, which from now we will refer to as the *Risāla*, and Paul's original *Letter* shows that they are virtually identical in structure, although the *Risāla* is maybe three or even four times as long as the *Letter*, a feature that calls for explanation. The *Letter* and the *Risāla* have not previously been systematically compared, though scholars who have inspected them have not noted significant differences. E. Fritsch sees the changes in the *Risāla* as consisting mainly of minor adaptations and additions, references to the Old Testament and some editorial emendations,²⁶ while P. Khoury briefly refers to them as no more than a different introduction and additional quotations from the Qur'an.²⁷

Michel goes further than these inadequate summaries, and identifies four areas in which the *Risāla* expands the *Letter*. These are new arguments in the section on *tahrīf*, extensive quotations from the Old Testament to support the claims of Christianity, demonstrations from the Bible

²⁵ Samir, "Notes", p. 192, identifies this figure as a Nestorian.

²⁶ E. Fritsch, *Islam und Christentum im Mittelalter*, Breslau, 1930, p. 30, quoted in Michel, *Response*, p. 95.

²⁷ Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 10, n. 9.

that Jesus was foretold as Messiah, and reworking of the sections on the Incarnation and uniting of divine and human in Jesus.²⁸ But he does not go beyond outlining these differences, and says nothing about any reason for them. The impression that he and his predecessors leave is that the *Risāla* is little more than a light re-editing of Paul's *Letter*, mainly in the form of additional scriptural references. The possibility that the person responsible for the *Risāla* may have had a clear purpose in what he was doing does not seem to have been fully entertained. But there are strong indications that this is the case. We will now consider some of the most striking changes this unknown editor made to the *Letter*, firstly the alterations, then the additions and thirdly the omissions, and try to see whether these suggest a consistent intention.

Changes to the Letter in the Risāla

On the matter of alterations to Paul's original text where it is retained in the *Risāla*, we quickly see that these are not very many, though a few call for comment. Important among them is the opening of the *Risāla*, which reads:

In the name of God, the Living, the Life-giving, the Eternal and Timeless.

The following is what our master taught, the venerable, pre-eminent elder, *shaykh*, the excellent, unique and incomparable lord, *sayyid*, may God prolong his existence in the most perfect blessedness, safeguard him from evil and protect him:

You have asked me to make a clear examination for you of what the Christians believe, the followers of the Messiah who are diverse in their tongues and spread to the four corners of the earth, from east to west, from north to south, who dwell on islands in the sea and are settled on the adjacent mainland as far as the setting of the sun:

When I landed on the island of Cyprus I met some of the great men of that country and their leaders, and talked with the most learned among them and their doctors. And what I learned about the views of the people whom I saw and spoke with concerning their religion, '*an dīnīhim*,²⁹ what they believe, *wa-mā ya'taqidūnahu*, and the arguments they present on their own behalf, since you have asked me about this I will answer your question, because of the close attachment and great affection I have for you (P 204, f. 49v).

²⁸ Michel, *Response*, pp. 95f.

²⁹ These words, which are importantly different from the equivalent in the *Letter*, *wa-khāṭabūhum fī Muḥammadi*, '*alayhi al-salām*, Khoury, *Paul d'Antioche*, p. 60.3, are not clear in P 204 f. 49v, but can be confirmed from P 214 f. 47r.

Comparison with paras 1–3 of Paul's *Letter* shows that while this introduction is very similar in many of its phrases and sentiments, especially in para. 3 and its equivalent, the editor has changed Paul's scene-setting completely. In place of the Bishop's account of the journey he made to Constantinople and parts of Italy, and the views of the experts there about Muḥammad, he substitutes the detail of a journey made by an anonymous, though undoubtedly pre-eminent scholar to Cyprus, and the views of the experts there about their own beliefs.

It may not be altogether clear at this early stage in the *Risāla* why he makes these changes, especially since he goes on immediately with para. 4 of the *Letter*, where Paul's Christian experts explain that as soon as they heard about Muḥammad they made efforts to secure a copy of the Qur'an. He does not present any account of Christian beliefs as such, despite promising to do this, but follows Paul in setting out his Christianisation of Qur'anic readings. But maybe we can detect in the replacement of the bishop Paul with the anonymous scholar, who is called *shaykh* and *sayyid* and so as likely a Muslim as a Christian, a sign that the editor wanted to make the narrator a more sympathetic figure for a Muslim reader and someone who might inspire trust. Furthermore, in the widening out of his conversation with the Cypriot experts from the single point of Muḥammad to Christian beliefs in general, we might note some attempt to tone down the pointedness of the original.

A second example supports this interpretation. We saw above how Paul subtly summarises the Qur'anic accounts of Jesus' boyhood miracle of creating birds from clay to imply that his human and divine natures cooperated in this action. In the reworking of this passage in the *Risāla* this Christological insinuation is completely removed. The account runs as follows: 'He spoke in the cradle, he revived the dead, healed the blind from birth, cured the leper, he created, *khalaqa*, from clay the shape of a bird and breathed into it, and it was a bird by the permission of God (P 204 f. 51r). This reproduces para. 9 in the *Letter* down to the miracle of bird, then it abandons Paul's wording in favour of Q 3.49, which it follows almost *verbatim* preferring *khalaqa* to Paul's *'amala*. The editor's obviously intentional return to the Qur'an indicates a reluctance to tamper with the scriptural text, presumably in order to present minimum offence to Muslims. And it may also suggest a desire to avoid the accusation that he makes his points by distorting Muslim scripture, and so attracting the criticism of *tahrīf*.

A third example of alteration proves the same point. In its discussion about the disciples of Jesus the *Risāla* (P 204 f. 51v) expectedly follows the main outline of the *Letter* para. 13. But whereas Paul makes strategic omissions from Q 57.25, as we saw above, the editor quotes

the verse in full, leaving in the important *wa-anzalnā ma'ahum al-kitāb wa-al-mīzān*.³⁰ He then inserts part of Q 2.213: 'God sent the prophets as bearers of good news and warners, and revealed with them the Book with truth so that it might judge between people concerning what they differ over', and identifies these 'prophets' and 'bearers of good news' as the disciples, 'who went through the seven regions of the earth and gave news of the one book, the holy Gospel'. From this point he resumes Paul's argument that these figures cannot be the historical prophets since they are described as having one book, rather than the many books given to the prophets.

These are small but significant changes. Since he restores Q 57.25, the editor cannot make his point succinctly by using this verse to show that the 'prophets' had only one book. So he inserts Q 2.213 and uses this verse instead. The argument loses acuteness in this change, though it can now no longer be dismissed by opponents on the grounds that it gives an offensive misinterpretation of the Qur'an.

Alterations like this can be detected in many parts of the *Risāla*. They show that the editor had carefully worked over Paul's *Letter* and made adjustments in the interests of lessening the acerbity of some of its passages and possibly of strengthening its arguments against Muslim objections. Of course, this is what he would be expected to do if he was preparing the work to be sent to particular Muslim scholars for comment.

Turning to the additions in the *Risāla* to Paul's *Letter*, we see that these consist in the main of quotations from the Bible and Qur'an. It is not insignificant, however, that the editor always names the *Sūra* or Book from which a quotation comes, meaning that he has taken the trouble to supply these to Paul's *Letter*, where verses (nearly all from the Qur'an together with a few quotations from the Bible) are given without references. This indicates the care with which he approaches his task, and possibly his appreciation that among a Muslim audience proper references of this kind and the knowledge they display might go down well.

With regard to the additions themselves, the editor frequently makes judicious choices, as in his expansion of para. 10 of the *Letter* where he continues Paul's quotation of Q 57.27 and adds Q 3.113–4. His reason for doing this may not be entirely clear, but the point he makes is. Q 57.27 in his continuation reads: 'But monasticism they invented—we ordained it not for them—only seeking Allah's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance. So we give those of them who believe their reward' (he omits the last clause: 'but many of them are evil-doers'). And Q 3.113–4 is no less prejudiced: 'Of the People of the

³⁰ In P 204 f. 51v this actually appears as *wa-anzala ma'ahum al-kitāb wa-al-mīzān*, possibly in attraction to Q 2.213 *wa anzala ma'ahum al-kitāb bi-al-ḥaqq* which follows.

Book there is a staunch community who recite the revelation of Allah in the night season, falling prostrate. They believe in Allah and the last day, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency, and vie with one another in good works. They are of the righteous.' Clearly he has done more than complete Paul's quotation of Q 57.27. He intends to emphasise its condemnation of monasticism (something Paul himself as a monk would presumably not wish to do) and of certain Christian groups. Is there an element of intra-Christian polemics here, in which he may be wanting to elicit support from Muslims? Whatever his intention, he is certainly adding layers to the original *Letter* to give it a changed character. This is rather more than straightforward editing work.

The longest addition in the *Risāla* occurs in P 204 ff. 57r–61v, which is equivalent to paras 33–42 in Paul's *Letter*. Here Paul presents his main arguments about God having a Son and the Incarnation of the divine Word, together with the conclusion of his argument about the Trinity begun at para. 25. And he does so in brief direct statements which contain little explanation. The editor actually omits this passage more or less completely (he employs para. 38 on the crucifixion of Christ's human nature a little later), and substitutes for its formulaic rational points an argument based upon Biblical quotations.

He presents what is virtually a short salvation history to prove that from the earliest times the coming of Christ was anticipated, and indicates that the Jews were at fault for not heeding the prophecies they were given:

For this reason the Qur'an calls them 'those on whom anger has fallen', *al-maghḍūb 'alayhim*, because of their disagreement with God's word which he spoke through the mouths of the prophets; but as for us, because we have accepted the words of the prophets and have followed what the pure messengers commanded us, it calls us 'those on whom favour rests', *al-mun'am 'alayhim*. (P 204 f. 60r)

The net result of this change and addition is to shift the proofs about Christian claims concerning Christ from concise abstract theorems, which only Christians might find convincing or indeed comprehensible, to scripture passages centring mainly upon utterances from the succession of prophets. So the editor has softened the presentation, made it more accessible to those not familiar with doctrinal formulations, and turned its aggressiveness to persuasion.

Given this approach, it is not surprising that the *Risāla* does not contain original arguments. The editor is more concerned to present Paul's often terse points in fuller and smoother forms than to insert his own comments. But his expansions deserve full investigation, and sometimes they repay close reading. For example, in his continuation in P 204 f. 52v of Paul's argument in his *Letter* para. 15, that the Bible

could not have been changed since the time of Muḥammad because it exists in many different translations which represent the same text, the editor specifies that it has been written in seventy-two languages. This intriguing detail recalls the famous Ḥadīth about the seventy-one sects among the Jews, seventy-two among the Christians and seventy-three among the Muslims³¹ that Muslim heresiographers conventionally took as the main structural element of their religious histories.³² He makes no further comment about this detail, which suggests he may have taken it as fact or was wanting to draw Muslims' trust and sympathy by means of a familiar detail.

So we see that these additions are more complicated than mere multiplications of scriptural quotations. They show a lively, if conservative mind working to make the argument less astringent and more approachable.

This observation is also true of the omissions from the *Letter* in the *Risāla*, which can nearly all be explained as cuts of material that is either offensive or unclear. Many of the minor omissions consist of Qur'anic verses that the editor evidently judges have been given strained and unacceptable interpretations. Thus, at the end of para. 29 of the *Letter* (P 204 f. 56r) he omits Q 2.255 to which Paul gives a Trinitarian interpretation; and at para. 32 (P 204 f. 57r) he likewise omits Q 17.110 and the quotation of the *bismillāh*, in which Paul also detects references to the Trinity. More significantly, he omits the whole of para. 16 of the *Letter* (P 204 f. 52v), referred to above, in which Paul argues that Q 2.1f., with its mention of 'that is the book', *dhālika al-kitāb*, supports the Gospel, although earlier he lists this verse with others in exactly this supportive function (P 204f. 52r).

Presumably, these and other verses which the editor carefully removes would prove too offensive to Muslim readers who could simply not admit the Christianised interpretations given to them by Paul. On a larger scale, he also omits paras 45–6 and their strained argument about the cancelled note of debt, which we have discussed above, presumably because the practice of selecting favourable verses of the Qur'an which it seeks to defend is too far fetched (P 204 f. 61v).

The major omission of unclear parts of the *Letter* comprises most of paras 32–42, on the two natures of Christ (P 204 ff. 57r–61v). As we have seen, the editor substitutes Biblical quotations to demonstrate

³¹ Cf. W. M. Watt, "The Great Community and the Sects", in G. von Grunebaum, *Theology and Law in Islam*, Wiesbaden, 1971, pp. 25–36.

³² Cf. H. Laoust, "La classification des sectes dans le *Farq* d'al-Baghdādī", *Revue des Études Islamiques* 29, 1961, pp. 19–59; D. Sourdel, "La classification des sectes islamiques dans le *Kiṭāb al-Milal* d'al-Shahrastānī", *Studia Islamica* 31, 1970, pp. 239–47.

that Christ was sent as the culmination of Hebrew prophecy, and thereby turns a disdainful piece of logic-chopping into an appeal to scriptural sensitivities.

In making these cuts the editor was clearly intending to tone down the original by removing material that was excessively pointed and at the same time not central to the argument. The net effect is that the reader is taken to the main points at issue between Christians and Muslims without being deflected by secondary difficulties and irritations.

It will be seen from these examples of alteration, addition and omission that the Cypriot editor of Paul's *Letter* was attempting to change its character. Since the *Risāla* was intended for two of the leading scholars then active in Damascus, he must have wanted to increase its chances of gaining some measure of success with them by reducing its unnecessarily polemical features, and maybe points that would have prevented its arguments from being treated seriously. Of course, he did not succeed and with notable consequences in the form of the replies from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abī Ṭālib.

Conclusion

Closer scrutiny of the *Risāla*, based upon a proper comparison of the four manuscript versions together with a check against the passages quoted by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Abī Ṭālib, will be necessary before we can say with precision what the editor had in mind. And only then will we be in a position to judge whether this is a revision of Paul's arguments that leaves them substantially intact or a new edition with changed emphases and formulations. We have, nevertheless, shown enough in this survey to indicate that the *Risāla* is a careful reworking of the *Letter* by a thoughtful and diplomatic expert who hoped to make a case that Muslims might take seriously.

This whole correspondence presents a fascinating episode in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. It was begun by the deceptively reasonable Qur'anic re-interpretations of Paul, who can only have wished to incense his Muslim audience, and it was continued by the editor in Cyprus with his constant referring to scripture, who was more restrained but still presented discomforting arguments. But, of course, they were quite unable to gain any concessions about the value of their Christianised readings of the Qur'an. On the contrary, they stirred up so much antagonism that they received for their troubles some of the longest and most detailed refutations from any Muslim authors. Much of the reason for this failure lies in their presumption that they could tell Muslims the real meaning of their own scripture. It is difficult to imagine that they could seriously have expected a less damaging outcome.

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This volume contains papers from the Third Woodbrooke-Mingana Symposium on Arab Christianity and Islam (September 1998) on the theme of "Arab Christianity in *Bilâd al-Shâm* (Greater Syria) in the pre-Ottoman Period". It presents aspects of Syrian Christian life and thought during the first millennium of Islamic rule.

Among the eight contributing scholars are Sidney Griffith on the self-identification of Christian denominations under Islamic rule, Samir K. Samir on the Prophet Muhammed seen through Arab Christian eyes, Lawrence Conrad on the physician Ibn Butlân, and Lucy-Anne Hunt on Muslim influence on Christian book illustrations. There is also a foreword by the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo.

The picture that emerges is of community life developing in its own way and finding a distinctive character, as Christians responded to the social and intellectual influences of Islam.

David Thomas

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